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TRIALS OF THE MIND

Philip Rahv

After such knowledge, what forgiveness?

OUR DAYS are ceasing to be. We are beginning to live from hour to hour, awaiting the change of headlines. History has seized time in a brutal embrace. We dread the Apocalypse.

The newspapers recite their tidings: AUSTRIANS KNEEL BEFORE HITLER; NAZIS FLOG LABORERS INTO LINE. And in Moscow the State continues to massacre the firstborn of October. What an inexhaustible repertoire of shame and catastrophe!

The first world war ended two decades ago, and its end was preceded by the first workers' revolution. Ninety years have passed since the most subversive document of all times, *The Communist Manifesto,* injected its directive images into the nascent consciousness of the proletariat. We were not prepared for defeat. The future had our confidence, which we granted freely, sustained by the tradition of Marxism. In that tradition we saw the marriage of science and humanism. But now, amidst all these ferocious surprises, who has the strength to re-affirm his beliefs, to transcend the feeling that he had been duped? One is afraid of one's fear. Will it soon become so precise as to exclude hope?

Moscow, the capital of revolution, acclaimed by the oppressed of all nations. The acclaim is turning to revulsion, but many still cling to their faith—perhaps out of desperate need for some kind of certainty. At the third trial, as at the first and second, the leaders of Bolshevism confessed to crimes and perfidies without number. The picture they gave of themselves was so indescribably vile as to constitute the absolute of evil. But let us beware of absolutes: all too often they are but masks of the fabulous. "The monstrosity of my crime is immeasurable!" cried Bukharin. If he told the truth then our original conception of socialism was only a romantic dream. If he and the other accused told the truth then all that remains for us to do is to bow our heads and listen meekly as capitalism—once again, if only

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in contrast, secure in its ethics—makes haste to preach its sermon over the grave of the revolution.

The lessons, however, that the capitalist moralizers draw from the trials are in the last analysis summed up in the doctrine of original sin. We are eternally depraved; not even communism can save us. And in the Soviet press also the end-terms of the thunderous denunciations finally merge into the concepts of theology. No social analysis can explain such diabolic crimes: every attempted explanation exhausts the resources of the rational. For despite all the falsifications of historical facts, the transformation of the old Bolsheviks into fascists remains materially, psychologically, and politically unmotivated. Hence it is not really political criminals who are being tried, but sinners, evildoers, perhaps sorcerers. Thus we learn that it is in Moscow, the fountainhead of progress and the center of atheism, that the black arts flourish and conjurers have made politicians their bed-fellows.

But it is not only the old Bolsheviks who are on trial—we too, all of us, are in the prisoners' dock. These are trials of the mind and of the human spirit. Their meanings encompass the age. Much is being said and written about the "moral collapse of Bolshevism," but how little about the moral collapse of the intellectuals. Among them smugness has become the pseudonym of panic, and the more rapidly they abandon the values of culture the more sonorous their speeches in its defence. Everywhere they submit to the accomplished fact, everywhere they place themselves under the surveillance of authority, they rationalize, they explain away. Within such narrow mind-space revolves the thought of those who trade in the mind's beauties and powers.

War and revolution are the most crucial events in the history of humanity; they are the supreme tests of character, of political integrity, of moral fortitude. The trials present the problem of revolution negatively, as counter-revolution. We are on the verge of a new war, and already hostilities have broken out in several parts of the world. If to be a "friend of culture" means something more than merely being a friend of books, it is by subjecting the behavior of the intellectuals to these supreme tests that we can best judge not only their politics, but their morality,—in fact their culture itself.

After the last war the intellectuals repented, vowing they would never again be deceived—but now they are once more clamoring for blood. And always in the name of the most lofty ideals! They want to guarantee the survival of culture by guaranteeing the victory of the "democratic" imperialist powers in the coming struggle. The perpetuation of "democratic" capitalism is their sole perspective. In other words, they will fight to save culture from being put to a

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violent death at the hands of fascism, but they are perfectly willing to let it expire peacefully in the bed of bourgeois democracy.

The Moscow trials dramatized the agony of the Russian revolution. What was the response of the intellectuals? As a group they permitted themselves to be taken in by the professional illusionists of the Comintern. Some became outright defenders of the official versions; others are silent, not ashamed to be spiritually terrorized; only a small minority, mostly of the older generation of intellectuals, dared to speak out. The attitude the liberal journals have taken to the trials, despite occasional retractions, can be summarized in the following formula: "Some people will believe the trials are frame-ups; some people will believe the trials are not frame-ups. However, both sides are partisan. As for ourselves, we prefer to view them *sub specie aeternitatis*. Perhaps in a hundred years we shall know the truth." All other issues they measure with the inch-ruler of reformist empiricism; but for their editorials on the trials they hold in reserve a philosophical world-outlook. The truth or falsity of the evidence they consider irrelevant—they refuse to examine it. Besides, they argue, the matter doesn't really concern us. It's a factional question. To these people the struggle between revolution and counter-revolution within the labor movement is just a *factional* question!

Given such logic, even the term "liberal" becomes a liability. Recently the editors of *The New Republic* purged themselves publicly of liberalism by declaring that only the designation "progressive" suits them, as indeed it does. For in its peculiarly modern sense, a "progressive" is a person who will successively or simultaneously adopt every point of view, every alternative—except one. By thus expelling the revolutionary method of fighting fascism from the area of choice, the "progressive" conceives of himself as the only genuine realist. Actually, however, bourgeois anti-fascism is merely another quixotic attempt of the middle-class ego to surmount historic finalities. To the drastic solutions of the crisis which fascism and communism offer to society, the "progressive" anti-fascist replies by exhibiting his miserable assortment of plagiarisms from the ideologies of the two principal classes. His "realism" thus turns out to be nothing else than the sublimation of his inability ever to be original.

The masters of property, on the other hand, arrive at their immutable decisions on the basis of economic necessity. They know that the "intellectual" of the family has no talent for practical affairs. He is outraged because the firm no longer treats its employees with the decency and kindliness that prevailed when business was flourishing. He has failed to understand that in order to avoid bankruptcy serious measures must be taken. But they are quite sure that in the end he

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will "come around," accept a minor post and occupy himself with keeping the firm's books in order.

"I am not what I am." It is Iago speaking, as he dissects the means of mystification. The problem is to make sure of identities. Your interlocutor, your correspondent, your confidant—who are they? And he who is pressing your hand, is he wearing a disguise? The idea too is capable of blackmail; likewise the theory, it will soon disown itself. Ideology has its subconscious, its secret corridors. Its neuroses contrive amalgams.

At the trials the collaborators of Lenin declare themselves to have labored for years to bring about the restoration of capitalism. The accuser is Stalin. Is he the savior of the revolution or its destroyer? And Trotsky? He, of course, is the great dragon, the old serpent, he that is called Satan, the deceiver of the whole world, the universal demon. But the judges and criminals alike are Marxists, accustomed to think in terms of social forces and economic determinants. What forces and determinants conditioned the betrayal of Bolshevism by its organizers and theoreticians? The answer, again, is Trotsky, who seems to lead both a worldly and other-worldly existence. But he himself, powerful as he is, is only a tool in the hands of the Gestapo. Whose disciples are the defendants—his or Stalin's? They plotted to kill Stalin, but now they proclaim their love of him. In confessing are they being loyal to the national state, which Stalin embodies, or to the revolution? Remember Iago:

Another of his fathom they have none,
To lead their business: in which regard,
Though I do hate him as I do hell-pains,
Yet for necessity of present life,
I must show out a flag and sign of love.

But the mystification goes even deeper. We have been told that only a planned, collectivized economy, such as the Soviet Union has, is rational. But the paradox is that it is precisely Soviet economy which is today the most opaque, whose laws of development are the least known and least understood by social and economic science. If it's socialism that is being built there, why the monocratic method of construction, in the "Egyptian style," with everyone except the administrators reduced to the conditions of fellaheen? Legally the workers own the means of production, but the control is monopolized by the bureaucratic caste. In reality, however, control means ownership —or rather ownership serves as the theory, and control as the practice.

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Is it possible that all these years radicals the world over have been imposed upon, ensnared by an elementary plot of mistaken identity? Formally this new exploitative society does not resemble the exploitations that are historically known. Can it be that it is taken for socialism simply because it represents itself as such and because it seems *different?* If this hypothesis is true, it matters not in the least with what particular kind of ideology the new exploiters are operating. What they do is important, not what their ideology leads them to think they are doing. Ideology, when at odds with the facts, is merely false consciousness, though a deep contradiction between the ideology and the facts gives birth to social and cultural neuroses, frustrations, and crimes.

In the Soviet Union the *organization*—which concentrates within itself the State and the Party—exhausts the totality of social and property relations. Everything revolves around the organization, it dominates every aspect of life, it is society's prose as well as its poetry. "It is a huge machine," wrote Bukharin in 1934, "such as has never been seen in the existence of humanity." In the tyrannies of the ancient world and of the East, in medieval Europe, and in the modern bourgeois countries (including the fascist states), the members of certain classes, and sometimes even the members of all classes, possessed, and still possess, some means, some mediating quantity, that won them a measure of security from the demands of the organization. If private property did not bolster them up, they sought to take advantage of the divisions in authority, such as between Church and State. On this objective basis a morality of independence, of resistance to the pressure of the social power, could form. But in the Soviet Union, for the first time in history, the individual has been deprived of every conceivable means of resistance. Authority is monolithic: property and politics are one. Under such circumstances it becomes impossible to defy the organization, to set one's will against it. One cannot escape it: not only does it absorb the whole of life but it also seeks to model the shapes of death.

Regardless of the specific reasons that may be advanced to explain the confessions of the old Bolsheviks, to my mind it is this state of affairs within the country which provides the most *generalized* explanation of their conduct. The trials are juridical metaphors of counter-revolution; but it is necessary to analyse them in such a way as to disclose their broad historical content. Quite a few books, pamphlets, and newspaper articles have been published which refute factually the evidence of the defendants. Nevertheless, there is no having done with their larger meanings. The ordeals of Marxism in its Russian captivity are subject-matter for the philosophy of history, not for the philosophy of the criminal code.

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It is in its particular use of history that Marxism distinguishes itself from all other doctrines. In Marxism history becomes reverberant; it is both its science and its rhetoric. It was inevitable that the counter-revolution should strike at Marxism by reaching out to confound its central source of value. Not only were the universally known, the plain facts of the Russian revolution falsified at the trials; the historic orientation, the objectives of the leaders as well as their identity were perverted. By compelling the makers of the revolution to confess that they betrayed it, Stalin was attempting to justify his own betrayal. His plot to assassinate the history of Leninism dictates the implication of his victims in a plot to assassinate Lenin. In thus forcing history to undo its deeds, to re-write its past, Stalin is subjectively undertaking to free himself of its necessity.

But the trials are also performances, plays, dramatic fictions. If literature reflects life, then their reality or unreality as literature ought to affect our judgment. It might be useful to examine them from the point of view of literary criticism. Are they tragedies or comedies? What perceptions, what psychological insights do they contain? What do they make of human nature? Considered as closed imaginative wholes, what is their inner consistency,—what coherence obtains in them between act, motive, and character?

Various interpreters of the trials have mentioned Dostoevsky, and, in truth, the confession was one of Dostoevsky's major modes of creation. But the poles of Dostoevsky's world were pride and humility. In these plays, however, the characters show themselves to be destitute of pride; as for their humility, it is banal, mechanized, automatic: the author seems to have filched whole columns from the *Pravda* to put in the mouth of his creatures. Moreover, they are completely lacking in individuation; the psychology of each is equal to the psychology of all the others. There is no conflict: their speeches assist the very forces with whom they are contending. These are people of will and stature, yet their motives are unworthy of them and their acts are shadowy, seldom emerging from the realm of intention and inept scheming. Finally, the quality of the sentiments expressed, the root-and-branch philistinism of every remark, removes the last shred of dramatic plausibility, of emotional conviction. Is it possible that human beings who have lived so intensely, who admit to such monstrous crimes and who are nearing death, could fail to rise to the level of eloquence? Manifestly no imaginative artist could have composed such plays; only a policeman can write so badly.

No, these are not dramas, they are pre-dramas, magical rites. Both tragedy and comedy have their origin in rites whose purpose was to produce fertility. Such ritualistic performances were believed to be effective in casting out the Old Year with its burden of sins and

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pollution. By expelling Pharmakos—the scapegoat, the sin-bearer—the community cleansed itself symbolically of evil. Tragedy, art—that is a later growth. In the Soviet Union the tragic is still in its embryonic phase; the State is barren, and to cure itself it practices exorcisms and conjures up spirits. Pharmakos-Trotsky is cast out into the wilderness, while the people and the government unite in a death-celebration.

In what sense can we speak of the treason of the intellectuals? Marxism has taught us that the intellectuals are a special grouping within the middle class, as much infected with its unrest and ambition as with its fright and phantasies. This definition implies that when the working class is apparently beaten, the intellectuals veer back to their old positions, each time of course under cover of a new set of rationalizations. The events of recent years have fully confirmed this definition; only, in this period it is Stalinism which provides both the rationalizations and a portion of the profits. There is, therefore, nothing very astonishing in what has happened.

One must keep in mind, however, that within the social division of labor the intellectuals are assigned the sphere of technical and spiritual culture: hence culture is their only real property. They are the guardians of values, on the one hand their cultivators and on the other their exploiters. They watch over the hidden manna even as they consume it. And while it might be naive to expect them to cleave to revolutionary ideas at a time when the proletariat is in rout, it should be pointed out that in their own mad flight they are trampling on the very values they depend on for permanent sustenance.

It does not require a revolutionary to be repelled by lies. It is not necessary to be a Marxist to be opposed to the perversion of historical facts. Never has the lie been so omnipotent, so blatant, as it is today; but the intellectuals, instead of pitting themselves against the power of the lie, are intent on selecting that version of it which appears respectable. The defence of culture has become their official program, but unofficially they acquiesce in the mutilation of all the elements that are the most vital source of culture. In this period one cannot accept degrading techniques and procedures in politics without degrading one's own intellectual discipline, without impairing its worth.

To the man of intellect, pride is a primary necessity. But this pride is being subverted by the strategy of the lesser evil in which so many have gotten entangled. The strategy of the lesser evil is the mind's education in opportunism. It creates the conditions for the

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disorientation of thought and the decay of its morality. The effects of this process are now palpable. On all sides today human beings are emptying themselves of individuality, finding it safer to become *tools*. No matter what question is asked, the stooge raises his hand. Literature, for example, after the bohemian roar of the twenties and the "proletarian" gnashing of teeth of the early thirties, is gradually subsiding into the gentility of accomodation. It would seem that for an intellectual it is far less pernicious to be indifferent to politics than to lose himself in its labyrinths.

Never have so many *fascinating* terms from the *obsolete* past, to borrow a phrase of Lenin's, been forced back into our consciousness as at present. We had assumed that all the justifications for supporting a war for "democracy" had been exploded by the experience of the living generations of men. Nevertheless the intellectuals are again rushing to staff the propaganda-agencies of the war-makers. The exigencies of imperialist rivalry makes a new world war inevitable, especially since, with the degeneration of the Comintern, the threat of revolutionary action has been definitely withdrawn. Is it the business of the radical intellectual to take sides in this contest of national imperialisms? It is true that fascism is "infinitely worse" than democratic capitalism. What reason, however, is there to believe that democratic capitalism can conduct a major war without at the same time coordinating its human and industrial resources along fascist lines? And who will annihilate the potential German revolution, if not the French and British imperialists—once they have removed Hitler. The quarrel between the advocates of collective security and the isolationists is essentially a quarrel within the ruling class. Collective security is the formula of those who want to go to war at once, but the isolationists are equally committed to uphold bourgeois interests. The war, even if the "democrats" win, will not solve a single fundamental problem of society. The new Versailles, which all the devout essays and speeches of the intellectuals will fail to avert, will prepare the ground for forms of social retrogression even more frightful than fascism—if such are imaginable. To assent to the war plans of one's own ruling class means to assent to "civil peace" at home—the *Union Sacrée*—which the politics of the class struggle defines as "the highest form of the conspiracy of the rulers against the ruled." And this is the "future" for which Stalinism and liberalism demand of us that we abandon the principles of classic Marxism, its knowledge and foresight. Their demands must be rejected. Only unalterable opposition to capitalism, only the utilization of the imperialist war for revolutionary ends, opens any prospects to humanity and its culture.

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The historic process must be conceived on the plane of tragedy. To regard it as melodrama is to believe that it yields to accident, cunning, and heroics. On a provisional scale such yielding may occur; none the less within the final implacable summation the impurities are dissolved and the interventions repulsed. In acting, man takes liberties; but only in recognizing as he acts the tragic nature of the forces that involve him does he gain freedom. To endeavor to become the authors of the tragedy of history is utopian—all we can do is identify ourselves as its characters.

Engels transposed Hegel's definition of tragedy as the struggle between two rights into the statement that it is the struggle between old and new values. The class war, insofar as it encompasses the historic process, is essentially tragic. Both sides are right—yet in different ways. One class defends its acquisitions, its "right" not to be uprooted and destroyed. The other fights for its future, as only through strife can it realize its metamorphosis into "the human race." The intellectual, if his values are not to petrify, must join with the new, and in that very union he will redeem the old.

What is this new apotheosis of "democratic hope," this artificial optimism and fraternity of the people's front if not a vain effort to escape the tragic? Being unreal, it is but the inversion of despair. The trials in Moscow, staged by the party of fraternity and hope, disclosed the mechanism of the inversion; and the intellectual sterility of the age belies its optimism. In attempting to crawl out from the cave of national socialism the Stalinist party will discover that peasant guile is no substitute for those qualities which only the international action of the class can create. To the liberal, "progressive," and machine-Communist alike history is an obstruction to be circumvented rather than the mode and temper of social existence. The petty-bourgeois makes the happy ending of melodrama his condition for participating in a tragedy. Such a gross misreading of the text of historic experience can end only in defeat, and to the defeated, as a modern poet has written, history

May say Alas but cannot help nor pardon.

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TWO POEMS

Pastoral

When thin autumnal mists in early mornings
Netted the lanes, the elms would droop weak branches
For water to gather on and quietly drip
Upon leaf-carpets trampled on the pathways.
I remember many such autumn mornings
When the pale sun hardly discoloured the sky
And all the noise was the dropping sound of water
Condensing slowly at fingertips of twigs,
And creaking timber groaning in the wind.
That was always the beginning of the cold season
The air drowsy with a langorous fulfilment,
Horse-chestnuts dropping glistening conkers
From split green burrs lined with a snowy satin
And apples shaken from the heavy boughs.
But it is impossible to return to childhood,
And in this town on an autumnal morning
Only a thin fog crawls along the gutters
And a black plane-tree pushing through the pavement
Shrivels, and washing flutters in backyards
Where rise the shouts of the half-starved children.

Ballad

After a day of working hard
  On a canvas-stitching machine
I meet my love in the cinema
  On an aluminium screen.

There was a time when I was young
  A young man courted me,
He was a mechanic at Ponders End
  In a bicycle factory.

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He caught his wrist in a broken belt
  And smashed his arm to shreds.
They carried him home on a first-aid stretcher
  Past the unfriendly sheds.

Two years on workmen's compensation
  One on the P. A. C.,
He told me one evening by the canal
  He could never marry me.

I looked in the dark water
  Where the moon hung blank as stone,
I looked at his angry, bitter face
  And I walked home alone.

O life was empty and dreary,
  My hopes were broken all
I could only find distraction
  In the dance or amusement hall.

More real than earthly flowers
  Are the blossoms of the film,
They have no fragrance time can take,
  No gusts disturb their calm.

More sweet than carnal passions
  The longings that I feel
All evening long as I lie within
  The arms of an ideal.

After each day in the workshop
  At the clattering machine
I live my loves in the cinema
  On an aluminum screen.

D. S. Savage

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SOME SOCIAL USES AND ABUSES OF SEMANTICS

Sidney Hook

RECENT philosophy has been increasingly concerned with the nature of words, meaning and communication. The work of Peirce, James and Dewey in America, of Russell and Wittgenstein in England, and of the logical empiricists everywhere, has resulted in a kind of minor intellectual revolution. Scientific minded philosophers have become self-conscious about their verbal habits and as a consequence have largely changed their conception of the nature of philosophy. Even philosophers who think of themselves in "the grand tradition" betray by their defensive mannerisms a growing uneasiness before the new movements which assert not merely that metaphysics is useless but meaningless. And the disquieting thing to those who are opposed to this new movement is that its proponents actually offer to demonstrate it.

As was to be expected this new tendency in philosophy has found its popularizers. And in the land of easy popularization, some of the general conclusions are being hawked about in the market-place as revelations direct from the working-laboratory of philosophic scientists and scientific philosophers. In fact, so much emotional fervor has been worked up over semantics that it has led to effusions that are barely distinguishable from the alleged verbiage it would eliminate.

Now I am convinced that a concern with the nature of meaning, communication and scientific method is of immense importance for the development of the social sciences; and, more particularly, that modern semantic theory constitutes a fruitful and much needed approach to some crucial problems in present day socialist thought. In indicating why this is so, it is necessary to clear up a number of misconceptions directly attributable to the more uncritical popularizers of semantic analysis.

First of all, enthusiasts of semantics have made the most extravagant claims concerning the *effects* of the failure to distinguish

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between words and things, abstractions and concreta, definitions and laws. Korzybski's *Science and Sanity* which is the fount of much of the vulgar literature on the subject and which is itself a diffuse popularization of ideas more accurately presented elsewhere, actually maintains that our semantic blockages, fundamentally derived from the principle of identity, *A* is *A*, are the cause of wars, revolution, insanity, prostitution and almost every other evil of modern society. This causal theory of the wholesale influence of bad linguistic habits on historical events is not so different from the theory that things can be controlled by giving them names. It is really a form of the belief in verbal magic in logical reverse. To believe that by pronouncing an incantation a man can be raised from the dead, or an enemy slain, is magic. The belief, however, that a man can kill himself by mistaking a word for its referent, or that a civilization can be destroyed by "bad language" is, it would appear, a legitimate theorem in popular semantics. A well-known writer of a book on the tyranny of words asserts on one page that to speak of a war of ideas is nonsense; and on another he laments that men are being driven to death by abstractions.

The practical importance of a method of making our ideas clear is obvious. It need not be fortified by large and untenable claims. Without some method of distinguishing between meaningful statements and noises; between statements of fact, statements of value, statements about statements; between predictions, resolutions and hopes, etc., our thinking about many problems becomes muddled. Muddled thinking tends to prevent us from finding solutions. False starts may be made, action may be delayed, and we may suffer as a result of what we do or leave undone. Clear thought which guides action *may* give us power but *how much* power and *over what* is not the business of semantics to determine. A hygienic language undoubtedly can facilitate our communicating with each other when we are discussing cancer or unemployment. But we may safely leave the question of the *causes* of cancer or unemployment to the biologist or economist. Even they, no matter how semantically clear-headed they may be, may not be able to discover the causes or cure the disease. Semantics cannot save the world; nor can semantic aberrations destroy it. The investigation of causes is the work of the practicing scientist not a footnote to linguistic analysis.

Another misconception of popular semantics is the assumption that, where analysis has revealed that two conflicting doctrines are dealing with uninterpreted terms or are committed to statements that are beyond any possibility of empirical verification, therefore no genuine conflict of any kind is involved. It is not hard to show that

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many traditional positions in philosophy and politics, around which furious controversy has raged, literally make no sense on any empirical theory of meaning. But it is utterly fantastic to infer from this that there are no genuine issues or problems involved, and that men have lived, fought and died because of a tropismatic response to nonsense syllables. For Thurman Arnold, for example, the clash of social philosophies is merely the juxtaposition of one form of nonsense over against another. And he does not hesitate to say: "Most of the interesting and picturesque wars have been fought not over practical interests but over pure metaphysics." Pure metaphysics may be nonsense but I know of no important conflict in the history of its expression, whether it be between realism and nominalism, idealism and materialism, which cannot be significantly associated with conflicts of a more concrete social and historical kind. And if this can be shown in the field of pure metaphysics, and sometimes even in theology, it is the sheerest dogmatism to maintain that there are no genuine issues and problems behind the strife of political and social ideologies. To be sure, the controversy over state's rights, the doctrinal opposition between democracy and Kaiserism, and between fascisms of various hues, *may* be unintelligible if we critically examine the sloganized assertions and the *verbal* behavior of the protagonists of the different sides. Both sides may be saying the same thing in different language, or talking about different things which logically have no connection with each other, or giving vent to intense emotion about terms they cannot for the world define to themselves or others. In none of these cases can a genuine controversy be sustained by argument or settled by evidence; but to imagine that this therefore precludes the existence of a genuine conflict is extremely naive.*

Perhaps the most widespread and insidious misinterpretation of modern semantic theory is that all assertions which purport to convey knowledge about the world or even to make meaningful remarks about it, must contain only those expressions that are ultimately definable in terms of immediately given sense-data. A variant of this view demands that the basic concepts of the science of physics, whatever they may at the moment be, serve as the set of ultimate terms. The test, then, of whether or not our statements have genuine referents is the possibility of eliminating all non-physical (or non-perceptual) terms and replacing them by their defined equivalents in physical (or perceptual) terms. The basic or end terms into which all concepts are

* "The Supreme Court crisis of 1937," says one writer, "was due chiefly to the creation by judges and lawyers of verbal monsters in the interpretation of the constitution." Even the semantically unsophisticated "man on the street" had truer insight into the nature of the conflict.

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reducible are regarded as necessarily indefinable. We indicate what *they* mean by pointing. This interpretation of the results of semantic inquiry has led to a number of extreme conclusions of the "*x* is nothing but . . ." kind. All abstractions have been considered as verbal signs of concrete things. When we ask "what do they really mean" they are to be ultimately discarded for the concrete things themselves. And every concrete thing turns out to be either a "complex of sense-data" or "a constellation of electrons" depending upon what the end-terms are taken to be. On this view, the categories of psychology, sociology, history, art criticism, etc., are regarded as having definite meaning only if they can be *defined* without remainder in the terms assumed to be ultimate.

If these demands were insisted upon, very little could be meaningfully said. The very demands themselves could not be communicated. Now the *sine qua non* of an empirical theory of meaning is that assertions must be such that they can be tested, directly or indirectly, by some set of possible observations. What the nature of these observations is and the character of the terms with which they are to be described will be determined by the specific inquiry. If we bear in mind the important point that we never begin an inquiry from complete scratch, that no one can ask for information unless he already has some information, that no problem arises save on the basis of some knowledge accepted as valid, then we will readily see that many propositions are meaningful which contain expressions not definable in ultimate terms, whether these terms refer to sense-data or to electrons. We know that such propositions are meaningful because we know what to do in order to discover evidence for or against them. We know that they are meaningful because their use results in a congruence of behavior between us and others who hear them or read them. So long as we know the conditions and context in which an expression is being introduced, we do not need to eliminate it by substituting a series of end-terms as its defined equivalent. There is no objection to saying "the personality (or even soul) of Mr. S. is diseased" if I can indicate the specific conditions in which his behavior will be called the behavior of his "personality," if I can state the differentiating character between diseased and not-diseased, and if I can describe what must be done and observed in order to determine whether his personality is one or the other.

The allied notion that there must be some end-terms which are intrinsically indefinable, and at whose objective referents we can but dumbly point, is purely gratuitous. Certain terms need not be defined in any specific inquiry because we understand them already; but theoretically, all are definable if they enter into significant discourse.

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We may define, for certain purposes, a term *a* (say capitalism) in terms of *b; b,* for certain other purposes, in terms of *c; c,* in terms of *d* and so on. It is both possible and legitimate that in the course of explicating the meaning of *d* and its definiendum, we may find that we are using the term *a*. The process of definition if carried far enough is sure to be circular. In the frame of any particular inquiry, the difference between good and bad definition is only, to borrow a phrase from C. I. Lewis, "in the diameter of the circle."

Failure to examine the contextual situation in which words are used, and to appreciate what the *sine qua non* requirements of an empirical theory of meaning are, often results in denying significance to many pronouncements which, judging by the congruent behavior of the people involved, seem quite meaningful to them.

For example, let us examine a passage from an eloquent orator:

> "The Aryan fatherland, which has nursed the souls of heroes, calls upon you for the supreme sacrifice which you, in whom flows heroic blood, will not fail, and which will echo forever down the corridors of history."

Disregarding the context and situation, here is the way in which the passage is translated by a writer on popular semantics* who substitutes the world "blab" as a semantic blank wherever what appears to him to be meaningless terms are being spoken.

> "The blab blab, which has nursed the blab of blabs, calls upon you for the blab blab which you, in whom flows blab blood, will not fail, and which will echo blab down the blab of blabs."

He then adds that the hearer who is semantically sophisticated "simply hears nothing comprehensible. The demagogue might just as well have used Sanskrit." This is just too bad for the semantic sophisticate! How does he recognize, then, that the speaker is a demagogue? And certainly the audience did not react to the above words as it would have to Sanskrit. (The Sanskrit, of course, could make sense, too!) It seems to me rather obvious that the audience to whom the above was said understood it roughly as follows:

> "Speaking for the German people, whose history is a record of the acts of courageous men, our party calls upon you, their lineal descendants, to be prepared to die whenever war occurs; we know you will respond to our call and promise you that future generations of men will praise you for dying."

This is a tissue of irrelevancies, dubious statements of fact, and calm assumptions that the orator and his party have been authorized to speak for the people who live in Germany. It is demagogy, but not meaningless.

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* *The Tyranny of Words,* by Stuart Chase. Harcourt, Brace $2.50.

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Let us now examine a rather famous illustration which Henri de Man employs in developing his voluntaristic half-truth that "socialism is a *passion* not a *cognition*." He recalls the case of Hassan, the date vendor, who always whipped up a brisk trade with the cry of "Hassan's dates are larger than they are!" Here the sentence taken by itself is clearly meaningless; it is not even syntactically permissible. It may very well be that in this case, as in others, people may be gripped and roused to action by sounds that make no sense. But before we reach this conclusion there are at least two possibilities which must be explored. It may actually be a *fact* that whenever Hassan hawks his wares with this cry, his dates are larger than those of other date vendors. Some reason, perhaps fear, custom, or exaggerated politeness, may forbid him to make invidious comparisons. In such cases, the cry is a meaningful sound which enables Hassan and us to engage in mutually profitable business. The other possibility is that those who rush to do business with him may actually think he is *saying*: "Hassan's dates are larger than others."*

What is meaningful in actual discourse cannot always be determined by simply looking at sentences. It is necessary to observe the wider context of interest, situation and activity in which the sentence is used, and its effects upon the behavior of the people communicating with each other.

II

The modern theory of semantics has a great deal to recommend it once it is rescued from its popularizers. Particularly in the field of social theory and criticism its usefulness is great. It provides a method by which we may distinguish between definitions that are disguised resolutions and general propositions that are predictions; between propositions concerning what is the case and propositions concerning what we regard as desirable, whether it be the case or not. Further, it suggests many problems for further research, including among others, the question of how we actually verify propositions concerning what is desirable. And in doing so, it enables us to liberate ourselves from many curious verbal fixations and fetishisms. These are as

* For example, I have known people who have been induced to buy by the assurance that the commodity "was cheap at half the price." When questioned, they indicated that they thought this meant "cheap at twice the price." There is also on record the case of the small boy who for years had been saying "no welcome" in acknowledging a "thank you" and had always been understood as saying "you're welcome."

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characteristic of left-wing movements as of those they oppose, and contribute not a little to obscuring judgment.

In order to indicate the cutting edge of this approach, I shall apply it to some propositions in the Marxian theory of the state. The discussion will take us a long way and will bear directly on the disputed question as to whether Russia today is "a workers' state." I must apologize for the appearance of pretentiousness in discussing these important questions by way of illustration. The following remarks are offered not as definitive solutions but as suggestions.

Let us begin with a proposition of Marx in the *Manifesto*. "The modern state power is nothing more than a committee for administering the common affairs of the bourgeoisie as a whole." The statement presupposes that we know the defining characteristics of the state power and the bourgeoisie; and asserts that the institutions, which constitute the state power, function primarily to further the material interests as a whole of a group of people who constitute the bourgeoisie. "State power" is a political category and "bourgeoisie" is an economic category. The proposition is not a definition but a statement of fact subject to verification. How do we verify it? We cannot verify it unless we know what is meant by political institutions and unless we can distinguish between actions which benefit the bourgeoisie and those which do not. What is meant by political institutions? Nowhere do Marx and Engels explicitly say but from their specific analysis it is clear that by political institutions they mean all bodies which make, interpret and execute laws whose enforcement ultimately depends upon the behavior of special professional bodies of armed men. This is a definition. No one is compelled to accept it. But it is of these institutions as they are found in bourgeois societies that Marx asserts a significant proposition, a proposition to be confirmed by observing how they function, *i.e.,* examining the laws of Parliament and Congress, the decisions of the courts, the acts of the executive, cabinet, military and police. Our investigation may show that the proposition is always true, or never true, or true with a very high frequency in relevant cases. It may show that it is true for one class of activities and not true for another, etc. Of course, we have also assumed that we can roughly determine when political acts have economic consequences favorable to the bourgeoisie and when not. This would have to be developed.

Now let us look at the proposition enunciated by Marxists who have generalized Marx's original proposition: "The state in class societies is an instrument of the ruling class." If by "ruling class" is meant "politically ruling" class the statement is a tautology. By ruling

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class must be meant here "the economically dominant" class. To assert, however, that the state is an instrument in the hands of the economically dominant class always, *i.e.,* at *any* given time, is obviously false. For, aside from other evidence, on the Marxian theory itself, political revolutions sometimes occur in order to create a new state apparatus to serve the interests of the economically dominant class. Economically, on the eve of 1789, the French bourgeoisie was the dominant class and not the feudal lords. So that on the Marxian theory of revolution itself, there are times when the state is not an instrument in the hands of the economically dominant class. It is then that the conquest of political power is on the order of the day.

The proposition that "the state is an instrument of the ruling class" was used by Lenin to justify the existence of a proletarian or workers' state which would serve the interests of the workingclass against its enemies. In October 1917, state power was conquered in the name of the proletariat. But here again, it is important to bear in mind that the workers' state was not immediately the instrument of the *proletariat* as an economically dominant class. For a considerable period of time elapsed before the instruments of production were actually socialized. But more important, on the Marxist theory itself, the phrase "the proletariat as an economic dominant class" has no meaning. Under feudalism, the trinitarian coalition of lords, clergy and monarchy constitutes the economically dominant class; under capitalism, the bourgeoisie constitute the economically dominant class; but under socialism, which according to *definition,* is an economically classless society, there is no dominant economic class. Nor even in the transitional period, where instruments of production have been socialized. The transitional period is one in which the state power is used by those who *were* workers under capitalism, and their descendants, to change the economy from a capitalist to a socialist one. Worker and bourgeoisie are no longer defined in terms of their functional rôle in the socialized mode of production but in terms of their historical origin. But note the very meaning of the term "worker" changes when we speak of the "workers" under capitalism, and the "workers" in a transitional period from capitalism to socialism, and "the workers" under socialism. Under capitalism, the objective referent of "workers" are formally free individuals who sell their labor-power to other individuals who own the instruments of production and operate them in an ever continued quest for profit. Under socialism and during the transitional period "the workers" are those who perform useful labor; they do not sell their labor power to themselves and there is no other economic class to whom they can sell it.

Further, if we retain the meaning of "state power" assigned previously, then it cannot be true that, under socialism or a transitional

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period, the state power is the instrument of the "dominant economic class" because there is nothing which corresponds to the latter. But there presumably are bodies, in the transition period, which will make, interpret and execute laws whose enforcement depends upon the existence of special bodies of armed men; and once we have defined the term "state" in this way, and defined socialism as a society in which there are no economic classes, it is not a matter of definition but a risky *prediction* to assert that there will be no state under socialism. Of the state that exists in the transitional period, and of the state that will exist under socialism, we can quite definitely say that it will have other functions than those it has in class societies. The incidence of state coercion will fall upon people who are workers in the sense that they do socially useful work; the benefits of coercion will serve some special group of the population even though we cannot call them a class in the traditional Marxian sense. It is meaningless to say, then, as a *universal* sociological proposition that the state serves the interests of the dominant class except as we apply it only to past and present class societies or except as we change the meaning of class so that it extends much further than economically dominant class.

The upshot of this analysis is that it is either meaningless or quite definitely false to apply Marx's theory of the state to any period other than capitalism, feudalism or slavery. As soon as we apply it to the transitional period or to socialism, the meanings of "class," "worker," and "economically dominant" become radically altered. The mythology and muddle which attend most discussions of the Russian state are a direct consequence of a failure to note the semantic shift in meaning of the Marxian categories—categories which have a genuine objective reference to present and past class societies and *only* to those societies.

An indirect way of confirming this is to ask what it means to say: "The U.S.S.R. is a workers' state." Whoever, in order to find relevant evidence for this assertion, looks to the mode of economic production, is thereby indicating that by "state" he *now* means not a set of *political* agencies but of *economic* ones. He is identifying both in a nominal definition which, as a definition of the *state,* is incompatible with the definition previously given. If by a *workers'* state we mean that the decisions of legal and administrative bodies are democratically controlled by the working population, then only a knave or a fool can assert that Stalinist Russia is a workers' state, no matter how we characterize its economy. Now if the identification of the state form and economic form is rejected, then, on the original definition of state, certain *coercive* functions are part of it. But whom

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does the Russian state coerce? Those who apply traditional Marxian categories cannot say, because according to them there are no *economic* classes in Russia in the sense in which classes are found in societies where production has not been socialized. The result is the most blatant kind of self-contradiction as in the famous resolution of the Stalintern (August 20, 1935) which proclaimed: "The final and irrevocable triumph of socialism and the all-sided reinforcement (sic!) of the state of the proletarian dictatorship, is achieved in the Soviet Union." The reinforcement of the dictatorship (whether it is proletarian is another matter) and its increasing coercion is thus an admitted fact. But against whom is the coercion exercised? Evidently against a group of people who constitute a class *on some other definition*. What the defining characteristic of the class will be, in addition to their being subject to coercion and oppression, is not here in question. It may be living conditions, level of income, or even political opposition to totalitarian rule. So long as the facts of coercion are admitted, and the firing squad is only one form of coercion, those Marxists who want to understand what is happening in Russia must fashion a new set of categories.

Let us now examine further the position of those who say that by a workers' state they *mean* a society in which the workers *own* the instruments of production. Very well, what does it mean to say that the Russian workers own the instruments of production? The meaning, on our approach, is determined by the methods used to verify it and the evidence introduced to substantiate it. Now so far as I can see, the usual evidence presented as proof of the statement that the workers own the instruments of production are other statements to be found in the constitution and other juridical decrees. If this is *all* that is meant anyone can verify it by reading the documents in question. But now suppose it is asked: do these documents contain true assertions? Normally, we do not accept as evidence for the assertions that "there is equality of opportunity in the United States," "all men are equal before the law," etc., statements that are found on the statute books. We observe the social behavior of men in their relations to each other in order to discover both what is meant and whether what is meant is actually so. Is there any other evidence that the workers own the instruments of production in Russia aside from decrees? What can we observe in practice which will be sufficient evidence one way or the other?

The only clue to what to look for is to be found in other situations where we meaningfully use the term ownership. When we say that a man *owns* land, buildings, or machines, we mean that he has the right (*i.e.*, a claim enforced or enforcible by the power of law)

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to exclude others from its use or enjoyment. No matter what claim a man may make to anything, if the law will not exclude others from taking or using it, he does not *own* it. Now if we soberly look at the situation in Russia, we find that the workers do not *own* the instruments of production, but that a group of men in political posts, who control the armed forces, have the right to exclude any worker or group of workers from access to the instruments of production. On paper, every one is guaranteed the right to work; in practice, only those have the right to work who have not opposed the bureaucracy. If we judge the truth of a proposition by observations of human behavior, we cannot escape the conclusion that, in the ordinary sense of the term ownership, Stalin and the C.P.-G.P.U. apparatus own the Russian instruments of production.

There may be other special senses of the word ownership in which it is not true that Stalin and the C.P.-G.P.U. camarilla own the instruments of production. But there is at least one common and important sense in which they do. This may not be the Marxian sense but it is more legitimate than any other which has hitherto been applied, for we can test it. A complete discussion would have to be based on more concrete data; but no matter what data is assembled, if we do not know the meanings of the terms used, and what constitutes evidence for propositions containing those terms, the discussion will turn into a hopeless muddle.

This is not saying that where the discussion leads to a muddle there are no genuine issues between the disputants. There probably will be some, which further analysis may bring to light, although they may not be the ones around which the discussion seems to revolve. Usually a disagreement about whether or not some fancied practical consequence is desirable is at the bottom of the noisy confusion. The discussion, for example, as to whether the U.S.S.R. is a workers' state often conceals a dispute as to what course of action it is desirable for socialists to take in relation to Russia and the Stalin regime in the event of war. The disputants often think it is necessary to find some theoretical analysis which can serve as a premise from which their practical policy follows as a logical corollary. They are surer of what they want to do than of why they want to do it. It would be much more fruitful if they tested the desirability of one policy over another by the predictable consequences of acting upon it, rather than by building under it a scaffold of semantic confusion.

The difficulties in applying proper semantic analysis to social affairs are obvious. There are so many undefined terms in use that the analysis may become wearisome. Sooner or later someone is sure to say, "but all this is purely verbal." As for the first point, it is

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important to remember that not all terms need to be defined, except when a difficulty in communication focuses attention upon it. As for the second point, an analysis which terminates with a question clearly put, which points to the kind of operations that must be performed to test it, is a wholesome stimulus to scientific investigation.

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THE AMERICA OF JOHN DOS PASSOS

Lionel Trilling

U. S. A. is far more impressive than even its three impressive parts—*42nd Parallel, 1919, The Big Money*—might have led one to expect.* It stands as the important American novel of the decade, on the whole more satisfying than anything else we have. It lacks any touch of eccentricity; it is startlingly normal; at the risk of seeming paradoxical one might say that it is exciting because of its quality of cliché: here are comprised the judgments about modern American life that many of us have been living on for years.

Yet too much must not be claimed for this book. To-day we are inclined to make literature too important, to estimate the writer's function at an impossibly high rate, to believe that he can encompass and resolve all the contradictions, and to demand that he should. We forget that, by reason of his human nature, he is likely to win the intense perception of a single truth at the cost of a relative blindness to other truths. We expect a single man to give us all the answers and produce the "synthesis." And then when the writer, hailed for giving us much, is discovered to have given us less than everything, we turn from him in a reaction of disappointment: he has given us nothing. A great deal has been claimed for Dos Passos and it is important, now that *U. S. A.* is completed, to mark off the boundaries of its enterprise and see what it does not do so that we may know what it does do.

One thing *U. S. A.* does not do is originate; it confirms but does not advance and it summarizes but does not suggest. There is no accent or tone of feeling that one is tempted to make one's own and carry further in one's own way. No writer, I think, will go to school to Dos Passos, and readers, however much they may admire him will not stand in the relation to him in which they stand, say, to Stendhal or Henry James or even E. M. Forster. Dos Passos' plan is greater than its result in feeling; his book *tells* more than it *is*. Yet what it tells, and tells with accuracy, subtlety and skill, is enormously important and no one else has yet told it half so well.

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* *U. S. A.* By John Dos Passos. Harcourt, Brace. $3.00.

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Nor is *U. S. A.* as all-embracing as its admirers claim. True, Dos Passos not only represents a great national scene but he embodies, as I have said, the cultural tradition of the intellectual Left. But he does not encompass—does not pretend to encompass in this book—all of either. Despite his title, he is consciously selective of his America and he is, as I shall try to show, consciously corrective of the cultural tradition from which he stems.

Briefly and crudely, this cultural tradition may be said to consist of the following beliefs, which are not so much formulations of theory or principles of action as they are emotional tendencies: that the collective aspects of life may be distinguished from the individual aspects; that the collective aspects are basically important and are good; that the individual aspects are, or should be, of small interest and that they contain a destructive principle; that the fate of the individual is determined by social forces; that the social forces now dominant are evil; that there is a conflict between the dominant social forces and other, better, rising forces; that it is certain or very likely that the rising forces will overcome the now dominant ones. *U. S. A.* conforms to some but not to all of these assumptions. The lack of any protagonists in the trilogy, the equal attention given to many people, have generally been taken to represent Dos Passos' recognition of the importance of the collective idea. The book's historical apparatus indicates the author's belief in social determination. And there can be no slightest doubt of Dos Passos' attitude to the dominant forces of our time: he hates them.

But Dos Passos modifies the tradition in three important respects. Despite the collective elements of his trilogy, he puts a peculiar importance upon the individual. Again, he avoids propounding any sharp conflict between the dominant forces of evil and the rising forces of good; more specifically, he does not write of a class struggle, nor is he much concerned with the notion of class in the political sense. Finally, he is not at all assured of the eventual triumph of good; he pins no faith on any force or party—indeed he is almost alone of the novelists of the Left (Silone is the only other one that comes to mind) in saying that the creeds and idealisms of the Left may bring corruption quite as well as the greeds and cynicisms of the established order; he has refused to cry "Allons! the road lies before us," and, in short, his novel issues in despair.—And it is this despair of Dos Passos' book which has made his two ablest critics, Malcolm Cowley and T. K. Whipple, seriously temper their admiration. Mr. Cowley says: "They [the novels comprising *U. S. A.*] give us an extraordinarily diversified picture of contemporary life, but they fail to include at least one side of it—the will to struggle ahead, the

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comradeship in struggle, the consciousness of new men and new forces continually rising." And Mr. Whipple: "Dos Passos has reduced what ought to be a tale of full-bodied conflicts to an epic of disintegration."

These critics are saying that Dos Passos has not truly observed the political situation. Whether he has or not, whether his despair is objectively justifiable, cannot, with the best political will in the world, be settled on paper. We hope he has seen incorrectly; he himself must hope so. But there is also an implicit meaning in the objections which, if the writers themselves did not intend it, many readers will derive, and if not from Mr. Whipple and Mr. Cowley then from the book itself: that the emotion in which *U. S. A.* issues is negative to the point of being politically harmful.

But to discover a political negativism in the despair of *U. S. A.* is to subscribe to a naive conception of human emotion and of the literary experience. It is to assert that the despair of a literary work must inevitably engender despair in the reader. Actually, of course, it need do nothing of the sort. To rework the old Aristotlean insight, it may bring about a catharsis of an already existing despair. But more important: the word "despair" all by itself (or any other such general word or phrase) can never characterize the emotion the artist is dealing with. There are many kinds of despair and what is really important is what goes along with the general emotion denoted by the word. Despair with its wits about it is very different from despair that is stupid; despair that is an abandonment of illusion is very different from despair which generates tender new cynicisms. The "heartbreak" of *Heartbreak House,* for example, is the beginning of new courage and I can think of no more useful *political* job for the literary man today than, by the representation of despair, to cauterize the exposed soft tissue of too-easy hope.

Even more than the despair, what has disturbed the radical admirers of Dos Passos' work is his appearance of indifference to the idea of the class struggle. Mr. Whipple correctly points out that the characters of *U. S. A.* are all "midway people in somewhat ambiguous positions." Thus, there are no bankers or industrialists (except incidentally) but only J. Ward Morehouse, their servant; there are no factory workers (except, again, incidentally), no farmers, but only itinerant workers, individualistic mechanics, actresses, interior decorators.

This, surely, is a limitation in a book that has had claimed for it a complete national picture. But when we say limitation we may mean just that or we may mean falsification, and I do not

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think that Dos Passos has falsified. The idea of class is not simple but complex. Socially it is extremely difficult to determine. It cannot be determined, for instance, by asking individuals to what class they belong; nor is it easy to convince them that they belong to one class or another. We may, to be sure, demonstrate the idea of class at income-extremes or function-extremes, but when we leave these we must fall back upon the criterion of "interest"—by which we must mean *real* interest ("real will" in the Rousseauian sense) and not what people say or think they want. Even the criterion of action will not determine completely the class to which people belong. Class, then, is a useful but often undetermined category of political and social thought. The political leader and the political theorist will make use of it in ways different from those of the novelist. For the former the important thing is people's perception that they are of one class or another and their resultant action. For the latter the interesting and suggestive things are likely to be the moral paradoxes that result from the conflict between real and apparent interest. And the "midway people" of Dos Passos represent this moral-paradoxical aspect of class. They are a great fact in American life. It is they who show the symptoms of cultural change. Their movement from social group to social group—from class to class, if you will— makes for the uncertainty of their moral codes, their confusion, their indecision. Almost more than the people of fixed class, they are at the mercy of the social stream because their interests cannot be clear to them and give them direction. If Dos Passos has omitted the class struggle, as Mr. Whipple and Mr. Cowley complain, it is only the external class struggle he has left out; within his characters the class struggle is going on constantly.

This, perhaps, is another way of saying that Dos Passos is primarily concerned with morality, with personal morality. The national, collective, social elements of his trilogy should be seen not as a bid for completeness but rather as a great setting, brilliantly delineated, for his moral interest. In his novels, as in actual life, "conditions" supply the opportunity for personal moral action. But if Dos Passos is a social historian, as he is so frequently said to be, he is that in order to be a more complete moralist. It is of the greatest significance that for him the barometer of social breakdown is not suffering through economic deprivation but always moral degeneration through moral choice.

This must be said in the face of Mr. Whipple's description of Dos Passos' people as "devoid of will or purpose, helplessly impelled hither and yon by the circumstances of the moment. They have no strength of resistance. They are weak at the very core of personality,

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the power to choose." These, it would seem, are scarcely the characters with which the moralist can best work. But here we must judge not only by the moral equipment of the characters (and it is not at all certain that Mr. Whipple's description is correct: choice of action is seldom made as the result of Socratic dialectic) but by the novelist's idea of morality—the nature of his judgments and his estimate of the power of circumstance.

Dos Passos' morality is concerned not so much with the utility of an action as with the quality of the person who performs it. *What* his people do is not so important as *how* they do it, or what they become by doing it. We despise J. Ward Morehouse not so much for his creation of the labor-relations board, his support of the war, his advertising of patent-medicines, though these are despicable enough; we despise him rather for the words he uses as he does these things, for his self-deception, the tone and style he generates. We despise G. H. Barrow, the labor-faker, not because he betrays labor; we despise him because he is mealy-mouthed and talks about "the art of living" when he means concupiscence. But we do not despise the palpable fraud, Doc Bingham, because, though he lies to everyone else, he does not lie to himself.

The moral assumption on which Dos Passos seems to work was expressed by John Dewey some thirty years ago; there are certain moral situations, Dewey says, where we cannot decide between the ends; we are forced to make our moral choice in terms of our preference for one kind of character or another: "What sort of an agent, of a person shall he be? This is the question finally at stake in any genuinely moral situation: What shall the agent *be?* What sort of character shall he assume? On its face, the question is what he shall *do,* shall he act for this or that end. But the incompatibility of the ends forces the issue back into the questions of the kind of selfhood, of agency, involved in the respective ends." One can imagine that this method of moral decision does not have meaning for all times and cultures. Although dilemmas exist in every age, we do not find Antigone settling her struggle between family and state by a reference to the kind of character she wants to be, nor Orestes settling his in that way; and so with the medieval dilemma of wife vs. friend, or the family oath of vengeance vs. the feudal oath of allegiance. But for our age with its intense self-consciousness and its uncertain moral codes, the reference to the quality of personality does have meaning, and the greater the social flux the more frequent will be the interest in qualities of character rather than in the rightness of the end.

The modern novel, with its devices for investigating the quality of character, is the aesthetic form almost specifically called forth to

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exercise this modern way of judgment. The novelist goes where the law cannot go; he tells the truth where the formulations of even the subtlest ethical theorist cannot. He turns the moral values inside out to question the worth of the deed by looking not at its actual outcome but at its tone and style. He is subversive of dominant morality and under his influence we learn to praise what dominant morality condemns; he reminds us that benevolence may be aggression, that the highest idealism may corrupt. Finally, he gives us the models of the examples by which, half-unconsciously, we make our own moral selves.

Dos Passos does not primarily concern himself with the burly sinners who inherit the earth. His people are those who sin against themselves and for him the wages of sin is death—of the spirit. The whole Dos Passos morality and the typical Dos Passos fate are expressed in Burns' quatrain:

I waive the quantum o' the sin,
The hazard of concealing;
But, och! it hardens a' within
And petrifies the feeling!

In the trilogy physical death sometimes follows upon this petrifaction of the feeling but only as its completion. Only two people die without petrifying, Joe Williams and Daughter, who kept in their inarticulate way a spark of innocence, generosity and protest. Idealism does not prevent the consequences of sinning against oneself and Mary French with her devotion to the working class and the Communist Party, with her courage and "sacrifice" is quite as dead as Richard Savage who inherits Wardhouse's mantle, and she is almost as much to blame.

It is this element of blame, of responsibility, that exempts Dos Passos from Malcolm Cowley's charge of being in some part committed to the morality of what Cowley calls the Art Novel—the story of the Poet and the World, the Poet always sensitive and right, the World always crass and wrong. An important element of Dos Passos' moral conception is that, although the World does sin against his characters, the characters themselves are very often as wrong as the world. There is no need to enter the theological purlieus to estimate how much responsibility Dos Passos puts upon them and whether this is the right amount. Clearly, however, he holds people like Savage, Fainy McCreary and Eveline Hutchins accountable in some important part for their own fates and their own ignobility.

The morality of Dos Passos, then, is a romantic morality. Perhaps this is calling it a bad name; people say they have got tired of a

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morality concerned with individuals "saving" themselves and "realizing" themselves. Conceivably only Dos Passos' aggressive contemporaneity has kept them from seeing how very similar is his morality to, say, Browning's—the moment to be snatched, the crucial choice to be made, and if it is made on the wrong (the safe) side, the loss of human quality, so that instead of a man we have a Success and instead of two lovers a Statue and a Bust in the public square. But too insistent a cry against the importance of the individual quality is a sick cry—as sick as the cry of "Something to live for" as a motivation of political choice. Among members of a party the considerations of solidarity, discipline and expedience are claimed to replace all others and moral judgment is left to history; among liberals, the idea of social determination, on no good ground, appears tacitly to exclude the moral concern: witness the nearly complete conspiracy of silence or misinterpretation that greeted Silone's *Bread and Wine*, which said not a great deal more than that personal and moral —and eventually political—problems were not settled by membership in a revolutionary party. It is not at all certain that it is political wisdom to ignore what so much concerns the novelist. In the long run is not the political choice fundamentally a choice of personal quality?

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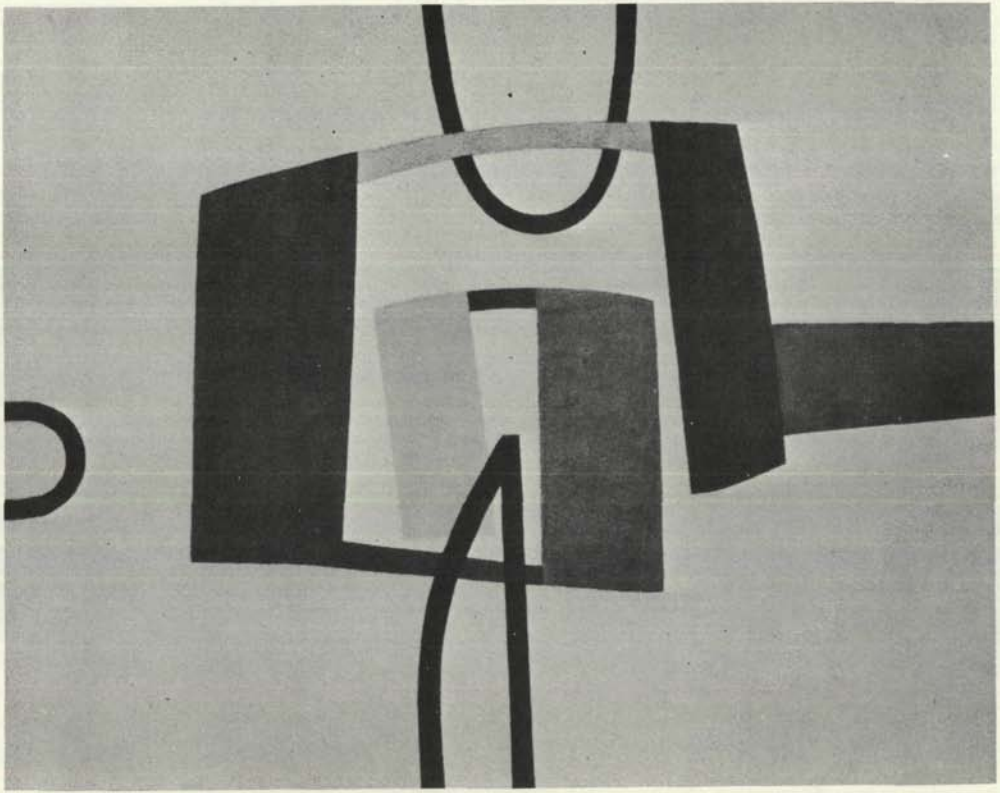

Jean Hélion:
Painting 1933
Museum of Living Art
New York University

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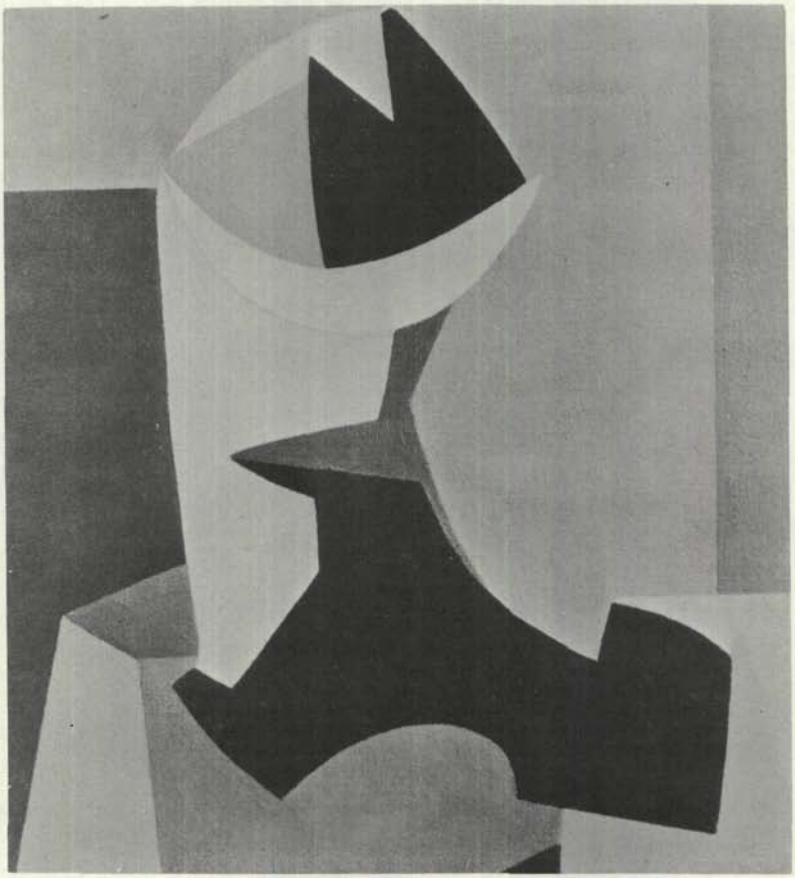

Jean Hélion; Painting 1937

Valentine Gallery, New York

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ART CHRONICLE:

Interview with Jean Helion

To throw light on some of the central problems of our time in art and letters, PARTISAN REVIEW proposes at intervals to question important painters, writers, and musicians in Europe and America. Jean Hélion, who initiates the series, is here questioned on his own career as well as on the work of his contemporaries, by George L. K. Morris. Eight questions, with the answers as written by Hélion in the original English, are printed below.

1. *In what ways do you find that the year you have just spent in America has influenced the quality of your work? or has it failed to influence you in any way that you can discern?*

One reason for coming here was to isolate myself from the milieu in which I had developed, and to reconsider everything. New York, so different in every respect, has shown me how much I had been influenced by the architecture of my own country, its density in the cities, the proportion between free space and built space, solid and fluid, curve and straight line, light and dark, hard and soft, and the amount of human motion composed with it.

However free the artist believes himself to be in front of the canvas, he is always handling an opposition of factors according to a scale of proportions learned through daily experiences, and varying very slowly. When painting an abstraction one doses these factors, that they may react upon the different amounts of the qualities of life that have been registered. Abstract or naturalistic, from far or near, art is always influenced by these.

A stay in a foreign country, foreign climate, foreign architecture, provoke opinions on colors and association of colors rarely experienced at home. The narrow amount of free space in New York has made me conscious of other variations in my own balance of free space and occupied space. After visiting any American show I have always felt by opposition a strict pupil of Seurat and Cézanne. Yet the dark ochres, the red bricks, the putties of your buildings, replacing the Parisian greys, have made me develop in my palette zones corresponding to them. No doubt, also, the violent light of New York has led me to sharper oppositions of values and colors.

Those seem to be slight influences, but the sensitive part of the

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process of creation is built with a mass of slight influences. The more intellectual Art grows, the more it needs to be fed on these to keep vital.

Nature, a city, a stack of decayed objects, are sources of forms and relations, a bottomless reservoir of plastic experiences. Observing is the best way to train eyes and to check up on concepts, even those remote from the use of objects.

But how much this trip has influenced the "quality" of my work,—others will see it better than I. Furthermore, any influence will be completed only when I go back to Paris, where things will look different in their turn.

2. *Do conditions and life in America strike you as less or more favorable for the rebirth of an esthetic tradition than in Europe?*

Material conditions in America for the artist, with the considerable help of the W.P.A. art-project, and the numerous possibilities for teaching, seem much easier than in France, where a small dole is all you may get when things become panicky. The possibilities for exhibition in America are numerous, with your large museums and touring shows, and your daily papers give at least more information than ours. There appears to be much curiosity about any form of art. The curiosity about abstract works may be transformed into a discerning interest by means of comprehensive shows appearing regularly. You and your friends have proved that these are possible. Great help may also come from teaching, and from illustrated publications.

In France as well as here it is hard for a young artist to sell if he does not benefit from some fashionable snobbism. Galleries trade chiefly in the works of men whose commercial value, regardless of merit, was built ten years ago at least. Our advantage lies in cheaper living and cheaper materials. Intellectually there is either strong interest or complete indifference. So much has happened since Impressionism that nothing looks new. Any idea is easily tolerated. It takes little money to print a magazine, but very few will read it, far less will buy it.

The young painter in Paris benefits from the continual possibility of meeting experienced artists who are among the very best and most famous. But much of what is made in Paris appears in American shows at some time. Perhaps the best we get through contact with authentic masters is a lesson of obstination, patience, and sacrifice of everything that does not contrive to build up our own art.

Art can grow in any place where artists can find some way to live, and try their best with all their faculties; in America as well as anywhere, not better. It is for the artist a question of building up a resistance to superficial public opinion, to publicity, agitation, conventions, and despair. Also a tolerance for other opinions.

I do not believe in any rebirth of tradition; it is not dead; it is cut to pieces, maybe, but can always be picked up and rebuilt in a new way. To discern the strongest way of gathering all bits of tradition, recent and old,—that forming the most potentialities,—and to forge the missing links so as to make it coherent, is always necessary. Now more than ever.

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Art is essentially something to continue, not to start; it may vary enormously, providing the evolution is homogeneous; it is born of itself permanently, and cannot be born of anything else. Painting is what provokes painting. This is why I believe in museums. You have many of those and some are excellent. There are painters in New York, and they find colors and time to paint. Art is there. Nothing more is needed but to continue.

There is little appreciative public; painters can furnish one for each other at least. I am afraid that conditions are not ready to be much better anywhere. Persistency will always gather a small public; to convince it, to help it to convince others, the only sound way is to show in our work what we think and what we feel, more clearly, completely and strongly, and to give it as much quality as it can bear from all points of view. Checking up, too, that we are not barely repeating ourselves or others.

3. *When you visited the Soviet Union, did you find indications that a strong plastic expression might emerge from its system of society?*

In U.S.S.R. seven years ago, painting or sculpture did not seem to play much part in anything but propaganda. Perhaps I was unable to find the men who were working freely.

For the naturalistic painter, there is no reason why he could not accommodate himself to any subject which he is paid and well paid to paint. It is a question of suppleness in its handling, in incorporating it into a composition of plastic values. If all I saw of propaganda was poor, it is probably because the best painters declined to do it; which should be a mistake. They ought to accept the test, even if not liking it, to prevent the lowering of the already low public taste, and prove by their work that, with subject or no subject, the plastic handling of form and color as form and color is what creates beauty. As for abstract painters, if any were left, the difficulty of reaching a public for their work in an overwhelming atmosphere of a country under construction ought to be much worse than ours. Being easy to make a living, they would be reduced to painting one day out of five.

For the immediate future, I cannot see why we should hope that the public would turn suddenly toward us, even in Russia, when our attitude is so dry, when the way toward non-representative painting proves so hard to find. The increase in time for leisure and culture, when achieved, will give a better chance for people to see shows, providing there are shows where all types of painting are fairly represented, and provided that artists of our type have not been completely discouraged. I fear most of the best have emigrated elsewhere. Supposing foreign art should be equally shown, some people will quickly find their way to abstract painting. It will be a minority, gifted, free-minded, among the very best, disregarding origin and profession. It is through their influence that a wider public may be reached, and chances of important works offered to artists. But what the power of those amateurs will be is something that cannot be foreseen securely. Let us not dream. A form of art as highly concentrated as that which we are trying to make everywhere,

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appeals to the smaller part of the public. Better hopes concern only a future too far to consider.

The best chances for popularization of abstract painting would stay with architecture. The emphasis on plastic values makes them suit the wall easily. They develop the space of the building and prove agreeable to a much wider public than on an easel. Collaboration with architects, in Russia as well as anywhere, must be sought, and will enlarge our circle of friends. This is entering by the back door, but now, for art, it is the back door everywhere; it does not matter much; if the activity is continued.

The chance given to many of you through the W.P.A. mural project is admirable. Has everybody substantially realized it and done his very best? A large responsibility rests upon them. The average of the naturalistic murals is not hard to beat, but the abstract, to help any, ought to show convincingly that beauty can be produced without a descriptive libretto, and that forms and colors can produce more than a decoration.

If a strong plastic expression may emerge from the U.S.S.R., it is not to be seen yet, but could only result from a very permanent activity in all branches of art kept on for many years. Logically, from the very fact that it would be a strong plastic expression, it would be supported at first by the minority of people whose evolution has led to developing their plastic taste to a great degree; thus probably little encouraged, for it is gratuitous to claim that this minority is sure to be influential. I believe it is too early.

4. *Is there any connection, do you think, between political trends and their expression through art-forms? In other words can the abstract painter today find an adequate creative impulse if he remains continually out of touch with society?*

As a man, the place of the artist is among society, where he has his beliefs, and also where he may live and work. Art, or rather works of art, lose meaning if not kept where they may be seen; they are social by definition. The artist cannot believe himself a solitary god creating all he feels that he must express in his work; the substance, more or less transmuted, he gets from life, from daily experience as well as from culture, from the experience of others. So everything forbids that the artist should isolate himself from daily life where culture is permanently tested.

Perhaps your question implies the participation of the artist in political activity? Painting, sculpture, any form of art, to develop far, requires all that a man has in his head and his flesh; and it is not worth while suffering so much if he is not to go far. You never give it enough attention and enough time; too much is already absorbed by the real need for making a living. I believe the best that a fully-convinced painter can do for society, is to paint as much as he can, whatever happens, at his best; playing his part in the development of art, wherever it goes, which cannot be foreseen. I wish I could convey the intensity of effort I

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mean. It is only that intensity that makes such an attitude acceptable and not cowardly.

It is for the artist a question of realizing his own unity, between his ideas, feelings, opinions. He may personally get into action, as one of the crowd. What else could the abstract artist do? Logically, if he is working sincerely and deeply, his opinions on society ought to be reflected in his work, but how this can be detected in the play of forms and colors, outside of any literary allusion, remains to be seen.

The case is easier for an artist working with naturalistic appearances. As I cannot consider naturalism, or any "ism" otherwise than as another way to provide forms and colors and to provoke imagination and feelings,—material for the plastic manipulations of the artist,—the importance of the subject, as such, is for me secondary when looking at that type of work. It ought to be easy for the representational artist to conciliate his subjects with opinions on society and politics. It would help him to check on them and improve the unity between his tastes and beliefs. And perhaps help his cause a little. With the exception of satirical drawings, posters, and such specialized means adapted to the average comprehension and taste of the public, I doubt that any plastic work can be used efficiently in a political fight. If an image is strongly developed from a plastic point of view, it absorbs the meaning of the subject. The work is a solution of that subject, after which there is nothing more to do about it; it does not call for action, but contemplation. The more beautiful the painting, the less convincing does its subject become rendered for the masses; it is dominated by the plastic activity. The subject can take sides, not the quality. And the subjects have not helped the best paintings in the museums to become the most popular. The help given, if any, is vague.

Participating in propaganda should help the artist himself more than his cause, by providing him with fresh opportunities to work, and the chance to test his means on a wider public; to show that beyond the motto required, forms and colors are working intensely. Every artist must desire to incorporate all of himself, including opinions, in his work, and must do it as much as he can. But abstraction is no more than other forms of art a voluntary choice; through a sincere development a man is led to it; it is the best he believes he can do. For myself, I am not satisfied with it. I keep on developing it as far as I can. I wish I could also name my opinions within it. No form of art is ever satisfying. It is that permanent search for incorporating more of life, more of intelligence, more of feeling and belief, that makes Art grow and move permanently.

5. *The progress of your own art has been from flat spatial structure to a moving spatial organization; and now your recent pictures, painted in America, tend toward forms sometimes completely modelled, that stand free in space and occasionally even suggest shapes in nature. Is this a step toward a rediscovery of the visual world? or was this suggestion accidental and a move towards new and complete abstractions?*

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Each of my paintings starts where the last one stopped. I manipulate again the same elements; I try to carry them to a point where they embrace more reality, where they develop more energy, where they mean more and show more. I began abstract painting with very simple geometric shapes. From one work to another I developed these primitive shapes into more complex ones. The more complex a form, the more possibilities it offers for association with other forms. I have composed my basic forms together in every order, thus building elements of different character, some almost mechanical, some almost organic. These elements I have opposed to each other in all the significant ways that I could find; and I have also combined them together thus forming richer figures. Those appear in my large compositions like individuals endowed with a certain plastic activity.

Thus each of my pictures offers a range of forms varying from the simple to the complex through clear steps.

To evolve from one painting to another is for me to vary the combination of forms again for producing elements; of elements to produce individuals; of individuals to produce new compositions.

Thus are born new agglomerations of forms, new dispositions, new rhythms, new movements, new plastic activities that in turn propose new forms.

A systematic variation of every part and every aspect of my picture stimulates my imagination toward all sorts of oppositions. By opposition to elements well set down, some are up, in full space,—flying above, so to speak. By opposition to flat surfaces some are curved, others built into complete volumes.

I give you here the simplest aspect of my process. But these different figures and oppositions derive also from concepts that I could not express here without lengthy explanations and from feelings that cannot be divided into sentences.

Painting is for me a language where the meaning is a potentiality of the words that cannot be separated from them. Here the words are the forms. Each form is built up with other forms; each element is built up with other elements. Every step of the process of construction is carefully organized. Yet the final composition amounts to a dominating "sign" that surprises me. The meaning of the picture results from the particular action of the forms assembled in this sign. It could not have been predicted.

Painting constitutes for me a complex union between plastic experience that can be conducted with logic and method, and sensitive manipulations of the forms that can only be cultivated as a passion, lyrically.

It is also an activity, a game where I permanently transform the rules; and also a contemplation.

It is impure inasmuch as it associates factors from different origins.

It tends toward purity in trying to stabilize those factors in a new unity.

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6. *Are the shapes and colors you employ usually governed by any factors beyond their function within the canvas limits?*

The colors act the same way as the forms, depending upon the variation from one painting to the next, from one part of one painting to the other, and from the condition of forming a definite coloration.

Their balance in the composition is often logically controlled, but their origin is mostly unconscious; the principal colors come in my sketches instinctively. Beside giving body to the structure of the forms, they weave different rhythms upon it, thus transforming it.

To function within the canvas limits is for the shapes and the colors only one phase of their activity, a certain condition put to them.

7. *Do you believe that the tradition of the Stijl (Mondrian, Van Doesbourg, etc.) can be perpetuated?*

This question comes a little abruptly. It is a matter of my conception as opposed to that of Mondrian's and the rather different one of Van Doesbourg, or that of Vantongerloo; or any other expressing relations with rectangular systems.

To speak only of Mondrian, whom I admire much, there is no contradiction in principle that new artists could adopt his position and means, and produce excellent work. Yet the extreme limitation of the means which, with this painter, is the final conquest of a long evolution, does not permit much further evolution for the follower without breaking the formula of "no form." It is like the top of a pyramid; any movement leads out of it.

8. *Which of the following do you think should most logically interest a young artist today: Tintoretto, Poussin, Memling, mosaics at Ravenna, Phidias, David, Delacroix, Maya sculpture, Chirico, Van Gogh, Matisse, Manet, Arp?*

Taking for granted that the young artist is aiming at giving body to his own irrepeatable sense of beauty, and at developing it, what lesson can he receive from the artists you name? He may recognize types of composition, coloration, forms, technique, bringing out in their works qualities that he admires or seeks. But to make effective use of them he must himself work with means compatible, even from a distance, with theirs.

A man belonging, let us say, to the neo-plastic school, can make very little use but verbal of the tradition of Memling or Poussin. There is always something to be understood in any work, but how much can be taken is the important factor. No painter of the past answers my own point of view, as built up by my intentions, feelings and means. Yet my technique would allow me to study coloration with Tintoretto, composition with Poussin, especially continuity through variations of all kinds, "modenature" with Maya architecture, light with Matisse, tense relations with Mondrian, for example.

One chooses what fits best one's own possibilities and needs. To take Memling alone as a tradition would mean to paint figures, in similar

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technique. A tradition in this sense teaches an opinion and the way to realize it. As we are far from anything like this, it is only a question of selecting separate qualities and means. They may well come from several painters, of the past as well as of the present.

Art has been rendered multiple, especially since the Cézannian outbreak; tendencies of different character get along very well, progress, live, and influence each other. I cannot assume for the young artist the obligation to choose one in preference to any other. What lessons he can take from the artists you name depend on the tendency he has himself reached or adopted. Also, in any work of real depth very contradictory directions can be recognized. The same painter of the present or the past may offer very different possibilities to the student.

About art, it is dangerous to generalize any opinion or advice.

Besides, your list of names loses much by not including at least: The Egyptians, Giotto, Mantegna, Fouquet, Ingres, Cézanne, Seurat, Léger, Picasso, Brancusi, Mondrian, Kandinsky, the Constructivists, the recent Abstract painters and sculptors, and the Surrealists.

In such a completed list, I give personally more importance to Poussin because I see in his work qualities that I miss in mine; but there is something to learn from all the men you named, all those I added, and of course many others.

I incline towards a form of modern painting that makes possible the use of the qualities of the ancient painters together with the most recent discoveries.

I see no definitive contradictions between them. It is the function of Art to associate contraries and solve them.

Our constant preoccupation must be to enlarge the scopes of Art, not to reduce it, not to confine it to a single aspect, a single case, a pattern.

JEAN HELION

Rockbridge Baths, Virginia,
March, 1938.

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DRUM-TRUCK CAME

E. S. Bley

TRUCK CAME RIDING into town with a big man with a drum, Boom. Boom. Truck came riding into town, down the highway into town, man driving, man sitting next to him, big white signs on the sides of the truck. We don't care about the sides of the truck, signs that say nothing in letters of red, big white signs, flapping, flapping. We don't care about the man who drives, let him drive. We don't care about the man at his side who owns the truck and thinks about the signs, he's a politician, not life, not life.

Back of the truck is open to the sun, open wide, open to the rain that will come from the sky like bathing and drinking and living your life. Open to the wind that blows like dying, quickly dying, whitely dying, quickly dying is part of life. Back of the truck is open to the night, the night will come (the night knows all and understands nothing). The back of the truck is open above and open in the back, backflap down, open in the back where the drum-man stands. He's our man, he's our man, man, man, MAN.

Truck came riding into town on a blue and white morning. Boom boom boom, our man with the drum. Man is standing on the back of the truck with a great big drum, boom boom boom boom. Simply standing on the back of the truck, beating the drum, beating the drum, standing like a river lies in the sun. Boom.

This is our man, this is MAN. Wearing a uniform, beautiful man, lazily alertly beating the drum. That's his job, that's his work, beating a drum so the people will come and listen to the politician making a speech. He doesn't care about the speech, he only cares about the drum. He's wearing a uniform, khaki and gold, uniform makes him straight and tall and blond (don't you believe it; he's blond inside). Uniform shows that he knows he's good, knows it, boom. Makes you feel that he feels he's good, feels he's man, feels he's life. Knows it like night. Feels it like sun. Shows it like a river with the sun's belly on it. He breathes, he breathes, that's what counts! Like water-gold points of a river in the sun, like beating on an empty lazy drum. Beating because it's easy to beat and fun to beat. Like blood. Boom.

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Truck drew up on the village square, facing the cannon, dead cannon, back of the truck was facing the square. Now boom boom boom how he beat, this man. People came running to see what the boom. The boom. The boom. They liked the boom. They liked the man, the booming indolent beautiful man, alert alive and beautiful man. Boom. How they ran to see what the boom and to see the drum and to see our man, our MAN.

Politician got out to make his speech, ran and hopped on the back of the truck. How our man then boomed then boomed. Politician smiled. Drum-man stopped. boom. Politician made a speech: I'm me, like me, vote for me, thank you (snarl). People laugh. Drum-man laughs. Drum is silent like after the phone, after the war. Man is alive though, in his eyes, laughing eyes, blue and white eyes, morning eyes. O beautiful beautiful morning eyes. And what a lovely lovely day. The politician went away, got into the front of the truck, not for us, we don't care, he is gone away, dead. And now our man, now our man, frantically lazily our man. Boom boom boom boom boom boom boom. Boom.

* * *

Martha came out of her cottage door as the truck went past, to see what the boom, to see who the boom. And she saw our man! The truck went past and she heard it stop on the village square. Don't you believe that she didn't care, she saw our man, o beautiful, beautiful. That was living, the boom in her veins, her temple veins, her thigh-white veins, her breast-blue veins, living, living, living, living. O the boom compelled her thighs and her breasts to match the living that lived in her eyes, her living eyes, grass-green eyes, timothy eyes, June-grass eyes. O what a lovely lovely day, what a blue and white morning, what a life-living morning, what a silently booming booming morning. Called to life, called to life, like a suddenly booming drum-man's eyes.

Martha was more woman than women. She wore blue gingham and a white apron over. Outside woman, shining woman, lovely lovely shining girl. She went into the house to get the sheets, husband's shirts, newly laundered, crisp, white. She came back onto the eye-green lawn, she hated to step on the grassy lawn, that she thought was like stepping on her eyes. Drum-man's eyes are blue and white (she saw, she saw), husband's eyes are like butter and bread, bread and butter (I like it, I like it, there's nothing better, better than bread and crisp-gold butter) but Martha is woman is woman is woman, bread and butter is sooner forgotten, husband forgotten, before the sight of our morning eyed Man.

Martha hung the clothes on the line, white bright shirts (husband

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dead in Martha's mind) flapping snapping, beating cool against her face. Beating white against her face like the sudden life of the drum-man's eyes, boom boom boom, like the waving of the drum-man's hair (our man) in the crisply whitely coming wind. How her life is now a life, living life, shirts are dead as her husband is dead (in her mind) washing cooking children dead, life is starting as a river blows, and blows in the sun, and foam and sun. (On the square the politician is making his speech.) No boom now but the boom in her wrists, the blood in her throat like a bird in her throat, living bird. Drum-man's eyes are gone but there, there in the morning blue and white air. Booming gone and the waving of his hair, but still they're there in the beating of the shirts, the flapping and beating against her face, the living boom against her face, against her soft warm belly-place. Living boom in the sight of our man, in the morning air, the call to life. Such a lovely day.

Martha suddenly forgot her home, the little white house with its orderly lawn, forgot why the shirts were flapping on the line, forgot her husband away at work, forgot her children playing in the schoolyard, forgot her life and lived her love, lived the life of her instant love, her morning love, of outside woman for outside man. Outside love that usually dies, dies in a moment of swallowed regret, lived this morning as a taste on her tongue, conquering beautiful living taste, burgeoning taste of honey and grapes. Instant love, morning love which we force-forget in the afternoon, dies on our fear like a river under mist, dies on our shame like a river run dry. Take this love! Martha breathed. Seize this love! Martha dissolved into honey and grapes. Take it now! Boom boom boom. Hurry now in the blue and white morning. How she runs (our woman now) Martha runs to claim her man, to claim her love, beautiful sudden shyly instant suddenly boldly outside love. Living life. O green eyes of living things.

The village crowd stands in a circle, gapes in a circle, around the open back of the truck. To see our man, to see him boom, to hear the boom. Our man, they breathe. Our man, they sigh. And let the thought die. Only Martha as the truck begins to move, sees our man, seizes with her eyes, meadow eyes, pasture eyes, lives the life of a sweet warm breeze over countryside, grasping, grasping, finding love on the palm of her hand . . . clenches her fist! pushes her way through the circle of crowd, runs and runs (feels her legs melt like a stagnant pool) gathers herself into a moment, jumps onto the back of the truck, jumps the truck as it starts to move, slowly move. Drum-man booms.

* * *

A tramp was loitering on the square with his shabby clothes and his shattered shoes and his battered hat, when the drum-truck came

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with the drum-man's boom. He gathered with the others to see what the boom, listened with the others when the politician spoke, laughed with the others when the politician spoke, smiled when the drum-man smiled with his eyes, blue and white eyes, let the booming run through his blood like the sun will shine through a summer rain, like the beating of the rain when the drops are big with sunlight prismed in each big drop. Ready to exert himself to live when he saw that others were ready to live, ready to claim the moment of life while others felt their passion die of fright. Smiled with the people when they smiled (and the drum-man's smile), breathed with the people when they breathed (and the drum-man's boom) as the drum-man breathed.

That was his way of living his life, living the life that he found all about him, leisurely always looking for life, living the moments he found on his journeys, relinquishing never but tiring quickly. His was a slow and rain-free life, he lived his life like a summer rain rains.

As he was standing in the crowd, he felt himself shyly pushed aside by a hand on his shoulder (Martha's hand!) that he instantly loved. Turning, he saw Martha (and instantly loved) as she pushed her way past him, eyes like a pastureland living for rain and her breasts beating quickly like a drum-man's boom within. He did not know or care that the meadow of her eyes (the life in her eyes) was normally a lawn that the drum-man had broadened for the very first time, that they would shrink again to lawn when the honey had crystalized on her tongue and the grapes had withered to wrinkled grapes. That did not change his feeling and need, his desire, his purpose. Loving was the process of his life, strengthening, fulfilling. The constant reincarnation of his mood was the falling of rain, the sudden sweet absorption, the rising as mist.

He didn't have to think or consider (he too is our man). The drum-man boomed. Boom boom boom. Martha jumped to live her instant. This was an instant of many for the tramp, the sudden love, the strengthening. The truck moved faster. Tramp ran, ran. Boom boom boom. The truck roared away and the tramp was on, clinging to the side as it gathered speed, Martha sprawled on the floor of the truck, drum-man easily beating the drum. Boom. Boom. Drum-truck riding out of town with the three of them on. Boom.

* * *

In the front of the truck the driver drove and the politician planned his speeches as he rode. They are shut off, they are out of our life, they are not in the account. Our world is the back of the truck, lives will be lived on the back of the truck by our woman and our two men.

They don't look at each other yet, these three, our three. This is the pause between separate lives and the living of life. They breathe

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the air of the blue and white sky that is part of their world and part of their life. Yes the sky is part of the world, the drum-truck world, our intimate world, and the undulating green in which the world is suspended, the fields of timothy and Queen Anne's lace, the slopes where devil's paintbrush struggles with the rocks. This is all part of our beautiful world, the banks of life, of our this life. It is such a lovely, lovely day.

Drum-man is standing in his place, lazily alertly beating on his drum, tall and blond and knowing he's good, feeling he's good, stands like a river lies in the sun. Martha leans against the side of the truck, watching the drum-man beat the drum, eyes waving like a field in the wind, hair waving in the boom of the sun, thighs strong with the beat of love. The bird in her throat is singing now, the taste is strong upon her tongue. The tramp is sitting on the floor of the truck and his legs are swinging off the back. The tramp is black like a fecund cloud about to be a summer rain.

DRUM-MAN. I don't have to beat when we're riding through the country, riding between fields and fields, riding and shining like a river in the sun, between green banks. But I like to stand and beat my drum, it's a crisp white sound on the morning air, it's fun. Boom boom boom boom. Ho ho.

MARTHA. I was hanging sheets and shirts on the line (I forget whose shirts, I wonder whose shirts) when the drum-truck passed and I saw you there. The shirts were white against the blue, they waved like your hair was blond in the wind, they beat against my face with the beat of your drum and my love was like a bird in my throat.

THE TRAMP. I was a small white cloud, fleecy, floating. It is such a lovely day.

DRUM-MAN. And I like to wear this uniform, and the way it feels. In fact, I might say, I like my job. That is to say, I like my life. I like the truck beneath my feet, it's faster than the ground, it changes color faster.

MARTHA. I never thought that I would forget, and leave my house, and start to live. Drum-man, I love you (before I never said that). I know it with the taste of honey and grapes, wild grapes on my tongue and my breasts are like honey. The bird in my throat is singing, singing. My thighs are strong.

DRUM-MAN. I love to ride, beat the drum. Boom boom boom. I love to live.

THE TRAMP. I live to love.

MARTHA. I lived to live but now I love to love.

DRUM-MAN. Boom.

MARTHA. So quickly, so nicely, my life simply ended. The

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booming came on the blue and white air, and you were there, and nothing else. I forgot all else and lived my life, gathered myself into a moment, jumped on the truck without a by-your-leave, came to you, to give myself.

DRUM-MAN. That is good.

MARTHA. Do you care?

DRUM-MAN. Yes, I'm glad. I like your love. I like the way you dropped your life to follow my drum. Boom boom boom. It makes me know I'm tall as a river and blond as the sun. It makes me feel that my eyes are blue and white. I'm glad I'm that. O boom boom boom.

MARTHA. It's a matter of courage, you don't seem to realize. I left my life where there was always a same tomorrow, left it for a doubtful today. With a bird in me singing and my thighs demanding with your boom boom boom.

DRUM-MAN. I don't understand your courage. I live my iife and the living comes, the loving comes. I take it when it comes. It doesn't really matter. When it's within the reach of my hand I seize it strongly like the current takes a reed. Hold it close. Live my love. Beat my drum. It's a man's life, man's.

MARTHA. But I love you, I love you, I love you, aren't you glad?

DRUM-MAN. Yes I'm glad.

THE TRAMP. I don't understand your courage either. When life is about and love is there my living grows and it makes me strong. When people breathe the morning sun I breathe it too and it makes us glad. If they forget the sun at noon or watch it die with a swallowed regret, I still follow it still as long as there is day.

MARTHA. You might as well stop drumming, the booming is within me, the blue-white boom, the morning boom. It booms for you, for you, for you. Don't you love me too, don't you want me, don't you?

DRUM-MAN. I suppose I will. You're one of the people, I've seen you all live, you seem to be afraid to live, afraid to love, all of you, afraid to stand and beat a drum, lazily alertly in the sun.

MARTHA. I was afraid when I felt the love, the bird in my throat, the beating in my belly and my breasts and thighs. I was afraid when I ran to the truck (under their eyes), afraid as I jumped (that your eyes wouldn't care), I felt my bones melt into a stagnant pool on a summer day, the frog in my ear.

TRAMP. Once I saw a woman afraid. She was crying because her lover had gone away, I couldn't understand. Then the wind changed and I floated off.

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DRUM-MAN. I think I see what you mean now, see but not feel. You mean you could not know that I would love you too, so it took what you call courage. How could you know? You couldn't know.

MARTHA. I didn't. But I knew that you would take me. The woman in me knew it, that woman that caused me to dress as I dressed, blue gingham frock and a crisp white apron. That part of me became all of me, outside woman, ready to act, to seize if I had to.

DRUM-MAN. You won't, of course. I like to love. In the morning sun.

MARTHA. But I started to. You didn't even ask me why I came, jumped on the truck, followed you. And so I had to tell you myself.

DRUM-MAN. I didn't have to ask, I didn't care. This is my world, a world of life, the boom, the fun of it, the joy of blondness inside and out. The world of outside living man. Anyone can ride on the truck.

MARTHA. Why did *you* come, you weren't invited. Or did you know that anyone can ride on the truck?

THE TRAMP. I didn't know or care. The outside people in the people of your village came out from inside them at the excitement of the drum. And so I gathered like cloud that will soon be rain, that is my way. And then you came and your eyes were meadows, fresh and green, I followed to wait until they should become tired and waiting for rain. I loved you and I came.

MARTHA. But I don't love you.

THE TRAMP. The drum-man didn't love you, yet you came. You had to come.

MARTHA. I never did before.

THE TRAMP. I often have. That's my life. The people of your village cried out for love, silently saying. And I was awakened and looked for love. And saw you come and found my love, as you brushed past me.

MARTHA. But I don't love you, you refuse to consider.

THE TRAMP. I never consider. When I am aroused I love and live my love.

DRUM-MAN. I never consider, I never act. There is nothing to arouse in me, nothing in reserve, my living is too constant. I'm more concerned with living my life, beating my drum, shining with my lips like polished apples, smiling with my teeth, my blue-white eyes. When love comes to me I take it. It always comes.

MARTHA. Then . . . there is no future? That should be the dying, the bird in my throat flying away, the drum in my bosom should be muffled by that. Somehow, though, I don't seem to care. I'm more concerned with the roundness of my breasts, the honey

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there, the taste of honey and grapes on my tongue. Singing (like a drum) singing.

THE TRAMP. There is a future but that future has no future. I do not wonder what will happen to you, and yet I wonder.

DRUM-MAN. I know what will become of her, I've seen her life. I see everything but understand nothing. Like the night.

* * *

The tramp curled up in a corner of the truck. Now he was a white cloud, easily his time would come. Floating, floating, in a sun that is not conscious he is waiting, waiting. The tramp is not conscious of anything but the sun and the warmth of it and the moisture of sleep. Martha and drum-man feel themselves alone, not that it matters, they needn't be alone, the intimacy of living lives is an also public thing, beautifully shyly public thing. Boom boom boom, drum-man beats, lazily alertly beats his drum. Martha approaches (where did she learn) the booming of her loving was a living thing. Now boom how he beats, our drum-man, living, the river rises to challenge the sun, bursts its horizontal bounds, throws the sunlight forth from within, waters the banks with its sunlight foam. Boom boom boom, boom boom boom. Furiously, lazily, beating the drum with his blue and white eyes, with his morning eyes and his straight tall blond. On Martha's tongue the grapes burst forth in clamorous bunches purple rich, the bitter skins, the sudden sweet, the sour seeds, the crushing and the honey. She takes the drum-stick from the drum-man's hand, o the boom of her breasts and the great bird singing in her throat and her chest, o the conquering clamor of her thighs and her breasts, o Martha, our woman as she takes our man, how his eyes beat out and the urge toward the sea. O the sun on the pastureland of Martha's eyes, o the sun on his hair (he is blond inside) and the rise of the tide and the forward urge of the river in the sun and the green fields drinking. Boom boom boom, our living hearts beating, the instant is captured, the moment of flood, the boom of the water, the river in the sun, as it gleams, as it sings, how the meadowlands drink and the boom in breasts and tall blond chest, and the boom and the boom, and the sun rejoices, and the instant is now lived.

Slowly, now, the flood recedes, and the sun shines softly on the truck. What a peaceful life as the flood recedes and the tired water is reclaimed by the furrow. The drum-man sits in the joy of completion, the tenderness and ease. Languidly he regards the drum, the life in his eyes is satisfied and his heart is quiet like a river in the sun slowly moves. He lies along the edge of the truck, the end of the truck where the backflap is let down. His lips are like peaches, completed, now. His teeth are concealed and his smile is within him,

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carefully distributed. He lies like a river on a hot afternoon, digesting the sun that its steadiness be of him. The gleam of him is dull now, solidly sleeping.

Martha's eyes are wet like grass as the flood recedes, and the taste on her tongue is a tender memory. Slowly through the hours the freshness leaves her eyes, the fresh fern look, as the sun shines hot. And the sun still shines and her eyes are dry and the bird in her throat is quietly remembering. And the sun dries her dress and the crispness is regained, the deeper blue and the brighter white of a summer afternoon. And the crispness is regained and her breasts are round and her eyes are drying from the flood that had been, tenderly breathing. The rising of her breasts is a good thing to see, a warm thing. The rhythm of her breasts is the movement of fields with the wind's hands on them. Awareness of the wind and the hot-heavy tenderness find themselves one in her, rebirth of living. The tramp wakes up, sees her with loving, aroused by the loving that still sweetly colors her eyes. Martha sees him looking, knows the look. The bird in her throat clears its throat as her breasts rise, honey and grapes reclaim her tongue.

The tramp was a cloud, the trophy of any breeze. Love was a breeze, an afternoon wind touching the hot day. What a lovely day. Martha's eyes are greening as the tramp's eyes darken, darken and gather like a cloud that will soon be rain. Martha's eyes have the curving, the warm earth breathing, the sweet green sloping of afternoon pastures. Now lying in the field would be like lying in her eyes and the hot sweet thought of it rises in our throats, like the bird erect in Martha's throat and singing now and singing (our lovely Martha now, like moisture rising in the tramp's sky soon to be rain (our man now) and soon be raining. The drum-man was stretched across the back of the truck, silently (now) and blondly sleeping. The truck lurched over a bump in the road, lurched the drum-man off the back of the truck, and he tumbled off and out of our lives. The truck rode on.

* * *

THE TRAMP. He's gone now.

MARTHA. Who is gone?

THE TRAMP. Why the drum-man of course.

MARTHA. I don't remember. I don't remember anything. Only a taste I seem to remember, the bitter the sweet and the sour of wild grapes, the blooming, the burgeoning, only the taste of the honey I remember, for they are with me now again, my breasts are like honey.

THE TRAMP. I remember who it was, the drum is still there.

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I should maintain this world as a world, I suppose that I should beat the drum. But we don't need this world in order to love, my love doesn't need a living world, it gathers a world about it as the rain makes slanting ties between cloudland and earth.

MARTHA. Now it is singing again and singing, the bird in my throat like a heart beating. Now it is to come again, there's no question now, no moment of weakness. Now my eyes are pastureland waiting for us to lie in them, waiting for the rain.

THE TRAMP. Now I am gathered, blackened now. About to be rain on the land I desire.

MARTHA. You did not doubt I would come to you and now I have come. Your life is good in that it is without doubt.

THE TRAMP. Yet with you there will always be doubt, and yet you will always answer. Instant love is part of you now, it is part of your living; the outside woman part of you is now part of your life. I know nothing but I understand everything, like afternoon rain softly falling. Now you will always be ready for love, that the fields have known children's feet and falling rain. The bird will always be in your throat, even though silent, often smaller than your heart, the taste will always be ready on your tongue, your breasts always honey.

The two found shade toward the front of the truck, our people living their lives. The clouds came close to the thirsty fields' horizon, the late afternoon of a lovely day, the quietly gray dusk. Thirstily the fields stirred, the clouds released their contents and found their desire. The cloud and the field on the horizon of a day found thmselves united by warm fragrant bars of rain.

Martha lay sleeping the moist sleep of early evening. The green of her eyes was fresh under lids of darkness. The warmth of the rain was of her, now, the quiet glad, the sleeping warmth, the slow dissolving.

The tramp sat easily on the back edge of the truck, dangling his legs slowly, the tenderness was upon him although he did not sleep. His eyes were white quiet clouds, evening-drifting. The world of green and things in which our world is suspended is dark now with occasional warm windows gleams. In the cab of the truck the driver drives mechanically, the politician dreams of himself in semisleep (they are not of our world). Suddenly the truck passed through a village where a carnival was starting. The lights were of the people, their eyes, the excitement, the noise was the shouting and the bright lights of the stalls. Young people shrieked as the ferriswheel turned, a brilliant earthbound constellation. Suddenly the night was life, the people living. The tramp on the truck felt himself gather, into a moment (this was one of many for him) and without more recollection

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than a warmth of what had been (the rosy bottom of a sunset cloud) jumped off the moving truck and ran toward the lights.

* * *

When Martha awoke it was night, alone on the back of the moving truck. The warmth was still with her, but slightly. The gladness was of her. Her life was wider now than the truck, her world was larger. Our woman, o lovely Martha to live. She stood up and looked over the sides of the truck, saw that the green was invisible, saw gleams that were houses, earthbound stars. She turned and saw the drum staring emptily at her, sounding her aloneness. Martha went to the drum and took up the stick. Some small sense of duty quietly born bade her continue the traditions of that world (as if it were her world). She thought she would beat the drum and be so young now, standing in the sun one morning like a field with the sun's weight on it. Lean black colts would come to nibble, gather strength and life from her, gather about her when she lay in the fields of her eyes and bring her love. But really when she beat the drum (once, boom . . . it dies uneasily on the night) she realized that the truck was not her world, that the honey of her breasts and on her tongue, the wild grape taste, the excitement and the change, the bird's wild singing and the flutter in her throat, would follow her back into her own small sphere, a porous sphere now, a globe of glass where the many greens reflect.

Suddenly the truck went slow (and the sound of the wheels and the engine sound) and the lights were familiar now below. And suddenly there was a small white house and an orderly lawn, invisible green (o Martha could see) and a clothesline there where the sheets and shirts hung white in the night air. Martha did not have to think (Martha, our woman always) dropped the stick and jumped off the truck, ran across the road to her gate. Her feet met the grass that was moist after rain and the shirts were limp and cool against her face. The bird in her throat gathered strength and took wing, flew from her mouth and over the road, followed the truck as it rode out of town, white signs flapping, politician asleep, hovered over our once truck world, dipped to the drum which was silent and dead, alone on the truck, and then flew back to Martha's lawn and found its place in Martha's throat . . . to rest, and wait. Martha took the sheets and shirts from the line, cool in her arms, cool against her face, and walked into the earthbound star, her house, her home.

* * *

Drum-truck roaring out of town on the night after love, the peaceful night. Drum-truck driving out of town with no one on the back but a drum in the dark.

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THEATER CHRONICLE

Class Angles and Classless Curves

Pins and Needles at Labor Stage is like a New Deal parade, a union picnic, a college play, a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta, a smart, up-to-date Broadway revue. "It illustrates," the program says, "the concept of working class drama which has guided Labor Stage, Inc. from the beginning: that plays for workers must be entertaining and alive." If Labor Stage, Inc., which is sponsored by the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, is any barometer of the state of mind of the working class, then America must already have achieved a classless society. For what *Pins and Needles* least resembles is the proletarian theater. Only its actors—cutters, pressers, cloakmakers and dressmakers of the I.L.G.W.U.—are proletarian. Its themes, its techniques, its perspectives are bourgeois-democratic.

In *Pins and Needles* there are, to be sure, certain nostalgic whiffs of revolutionary theater, certain misleading family likenesses to the old Theater Union Sunday night potpourris. The ancient enemies, Hitler, Mussolini, the Mikado, are once again summoned up—but with a difference. They have lost the aura of menace that used to attend them, and now appear merely as clowns. The metamorphosis of the dictators, as a matter of fact, gives the key to what estranges *Pins and Needles* from Fourteenth Street and unites it to Broadway. It is simply a question of intention. *Pins and Needles* is designed to divert. All the didactic and hortatory elements of the proletarian drama have been shed, and in their place we get high spirits, merriment, and bounce. Good nature has superseded bitterness. The dictators have turned comedians, and the indictment of capitalism is subdued to a genial spoofing of Macy's, militarism, Americanism (100 per cent, not twentieth-century), popular love songs, high-pressure advertising, social snobbery, and etiquette books. Ingratiation is the keynote of the performance. The presence of amateur actors on the stage is in itself disarming, and nothing that might disturb the good feeling between the actors and an ordinary middle-class New York audience has been allowed to creep into the production.

This bonhommie toward capitalism and the world at large is easily explained. Where the revolutionary theater represented (by proxy) a working class which was irreconcilably hostile to society, the I.L.G.W.U. players represent (directly) a section of the working class which has made peace with society under the aegis of the New Deal. *Pins and Needles* is the group expression of a large, well-run, relatively contented labor union whose union contracts are signed without much trouble and whose demands on the system do not exceed decent minimum wages, decent maximum hours, the closed shop, and the right to picket. You

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cannot produce trenchant political satire—at least not in America in this period—if your political horizon is the Wagner Act, and *Pins and Needles* is at its best and most characteristic in the song numbers, where the political satire, such as it is, melts into irresponsible good humor, polysyllabic playfulness, and musical wit. "Sing Me a Song with Social Significance," "Dear Beatrice Fairfax," and "Four Little Angels of Peace," all good, all by Harold J. Rome, are in the pert, worldly, staccato tradition that runs from Gilbert and Sullivan through Cole Porter. The theatergoer, whatever his class allegiance, is likely to go home humming them.

It is interesting that the one jarring note in this symphony of good cheer is struck by Mr. Marc Blitzstein, author of *The Cradle Will Rock*. In an hysterical sketch called "F.T.P. Plowed Under," Mr. Blitzstein belabors the Federal Theater, which last June abandoned his play to the mercies of individual enterprise. The sketch is strained and unconvincing even as burlesque: a personal injury has been generalized into a national calamity, and the spleen displayed by the author is manifestly in excess of its cause. Yet it is Mr. Blitzstein's stridency—in *Pins and Needles* so misdirected, so malapropos—that is the special, quintessential quality of *The Cradle Will Rock*. If the function of *Pins and Needles* is to ingratiate, the mission of *The Cradle Will Rock* is to antagonize.

A curious feature of Mr. Blitzstein's play is that, though it has for its subject the class war as exemplified in the steel industry, it is almost totally lacking in internal conflict. The conflict which one ordinarily finds within or between the characters of the drama has been moved out past the proscenium arch into the theater itself. *The Cradle Will Rock* is a kind of well-drilled assault on the feelings and nerves of its audience. What is presented is not so much the workers versus the bosses in Steeltown, U.S.A., as Mr. Blitzstein versus the ticket-holders in the Mercury Theater. The prominence of the author in the production—he is actor, commentator, and pianist—gives focus to the sadistic impulses of the script. Mr. Blitzstein's acrid personality is, in fact, the whole show. He, as insolent and sardonic entrepreneur, sits downstage center at the piano; the actors behind him are his marionettes. The timing and precision of the cast's performance have the cold, military perfection of the dance routines of the Radio City Rockettes. *The Cradle Will Rock* is a triumph of theatrical goose-stepping. The drama has become dehumanized; it has been made into a marvelous mechanical monster which begins to operate with great efficiency whenever Mr. Blitzstein pulls the switch.

Mr. Blitzstein's creatures are, of course, abstractions, as their names indicate. That is why they are so easily manipulated. Mr. Mister, the steel magnate, is the biggest abstraction of them all, and his sycophants, Editor Daily, President Prexy, Doctor Specialist, Reverend Salvation, and the rest, are presented solely in terms of their occupations. This is as true of the proletarians as it is of the bosses, shopkeepers, and petty bourgeois intellectuals, for Mr. Blitzstein's work has a wonderful uni-

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formity. All of the characters are exhibited as specimens of class behaviorism, and the result is a series of satirical and sentimental grotesques. There is an element of horror in the perfect predictability of these unicellular creations, and the little, white-faced, class-conscious Columbine of a prostitute is nearly as repellent, consequently, as the oversexed, overdressed, over-effusive Mrs. Mister. Larry Foreman, strike leader and hero, is meant, I suppose, to represent the spirit of joy in the insurgent working class, but he, too, has been stepped up into caricature until he resembles a madcap master of ceremonies in a Broadway night club, and his ultimate song of triumph carries an overtone of savage hotcha which considerably detracts from the high seriousness of the play's finale.

It is clear that Mr. Blitzstein's deterministic formula for playwriting rules out the possibility of moral struggle within his characters. What is at first sight more puzzling is that the class struggle itself is barely dramatized. The two groups, workers and bosses, never clash, never indeed really touch each other, until the very end of the play. Then Mr. Mister tries to bribe Larry Foreman to sell out the strike; Larry reaffirms his allegiance to labor; everybody sings a song; and the house lights go up. It is as if two solar systems had been functioning separately on the stage, and their meeting, which one might have expected to be a major collision, turned out to be a passing and inconclusive contact. Perhaps Mr. Blitzstein was too well aware of the brittleness of his puppet-people to risk them in any head-on encounter. His caution, whether deliberate or accidental, was undoubtedly justified.

The abstract and heartless nature of Mr. Blitzstein's work will, I think, set up an instinctive resistance in any normal American spectator. The pleasure one takes in *The Cradle Will Rock* is the pleasure of feeling one's native sensibilities violated. This play is having much the same kind of vogue, and producing much the same response as the surrealist and abstract art shows did at the Modern Museum. Though its setting and subject-matter are American, it is essentially a non-indigenous plant. Musically, it is very much indebted to the German, Kurt Weill. Dramatically, it shares a certain neo-primitivism with Auden and Isherwood, but it lacks the free play of public-school-boy fancy that one finds in *The Ascent of F 6* and *The Dog Beneath the Skin*. Its real kinship is with post-war German expressionism, which, except for Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine*, never managed to take root in America.

The fact is that the tendency of American playwrights has always been to particularize rather than to generalize. Even in the revolutionary theater where the emphasis theoretically should have been on the mass, not the individual, the American playwright's impulse was to write a "problem drama" with proletarian characters, and leave the mass recitatives to the Europeans. The Federal Theater in its Living Newspaper productions has been working with groups, but these groups have been visibly atomized, each individual being endowed with such little eccentricities as would make him "recognizable" in a sort of neighborly

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fashion to the audience. That this American method of seeing and translating experience has its dangers and limitations, that it readily drops into mere homeliness and triviality, the present state of the commercial theater testifies. This method, however, has within itself the power of expansion; Mr. Blitzstein's method can only contract.

Mr. Thornton Wilder's play, *Our Town,* at the Morosco, is the inverse of *The Cradle Will Rock.* Both plays are done without settings or props; both employ a commentator who serves as intermediary between actors and audience; both deal with an American town. But while Mr. Blitzstein is a sort of public prosecutor of Steeltown of 1937, Mr. Frank Craven, stage manager and spokesman for Mr. Wilder, appears as a kind of indulgent defense attorney for a certain small New England town of thirty years ago. Mr. Blitzstein evokes an industrial town which is abstract and odious; Mr. Craven and Mr. Wilder, a home town which is concrete and dear. *Our Town,* like *Ah, Wilderness,* is an exercise in memory, but it differs from the O'Neill work in that it is not a play in the accepted sense of the term. It is essentially lyric, not dramatic. The tragic velocity of life, the elusive nature of experience, which can never be stopped or even truly felt at any given point, are the themes of the play—themes familiar enough in lyric poetry, but never met, except incidentally, in drama. Mr. Wilder, in attempting to give these themes theatrical form, was obliged, paradoxically, to abandon almost all the conventions of the theater.

In the first place, he has dismissed scenery and props as irrelevant to, and, indeed, incongruous with his purpose. In the second place, he has invented the character of the stage manager, an affable, homespun conjuror who holds the power of life and death over the other characters, a local citizen who is in the town and outside of it at the same time. In the third place, he has taken what is accessory to the ordinary play, that is, exposition, and made it the main substance of his. The greater part of the first two acts is devoted to the imparting of information, to situating the town in time, space, politics, sociology, economics, and geology. But where in the conventional play, such pieces of information are insinuated into the plot or sugared over with stage business and repartee, in Mr. Wilder's play they are communicated directly; they take the place of plot, stage business, and repartee. Mr. Craven himself tells the biographies of the townspeople; he calls in an expert from the state college to give a scientific picture of the town, and the editor of the local newspaper to describe its social conditions. The action which is intermittently progressing on the stage merely illustrates Mr. Craven's talk.

Mr. Wilder's fourth innovation [illegible] In order to dramatize his feelings about life he has merely raised the dead. At the opening of the third act a group of people are discovered sitting in rows on one side of the stage; some of the faces are familiar, some are new. They are speaking quite naturally and calmly, and it is not until one has listened to them for some minutes that one realizes that this is the

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cemetery and these are the dead. A young woman whom we have seen grow up and marry the boy next door has died in childbirth; a small, shabby funeral procession is bringing her to join her relatives and neighbors. Only when she is actually buried does the play proper begin. She has not yet reached the serenity of the long dead, and she yearns to return to the world. With the permission of the stage manager and against the advice of the dead, she goes back—to a birthday of her childhood. Hardly a fraction of that day has passed, however, before she retreats gratefully to the cemetery, for she has perceived that the tragedy of life lies in the fragmentary and imperfect awareness of the living.

Mr. Wilder's play is, in a sense, a refutation of its own thesis. *Our Town* is purely and simply an act of awareness, a demonstration of the fact that in a work of art, at least, experience *can* be arrested, imprisoned, and vicariously felt. The perspective of death, which Mr. Wilder has chosen, gives an extra poignancy and intensity to the small-town life whose essence he is trying so urgently to communicate. The little boy delivering papers, for example, becomes more touching, more meaningful and important, when Mr. Craven announces casually that he is going to be killed in the War. The boy's morning round, for the spectator, is transfigured into an absorbing ritual; the unconsciousness of the character has heightened the consciousness of the audience. The perspective is, to be sure, hazardous: it invites bathos and sententiousness. Yet Mr. Wilder has used it honorably. He forbids the spectator to dote on that town of the past. He is concerned only with saying: this is how it was, though then we did not know it. Now and then, of course, his memory fails him, for young love was never so baldly and tritely gauche as his scene in the soda fountain suggests. This is, however, a deficiency of imagination, not an error of taste; and except in the third act, where the dead give some rather imprecise and inapposite definitions of the nature of the after-life, the play keeps its balance beautifully. In this feat of equilibrium Mr. Wilder has had the complete cooperation of Mr. Craven, the serene, inexorable matter-of-factness of whose performance acts as a discipline upon the audience. Mr. Craven makes one quite definitely homesick, but pulls one up sharp if one begins to blubber about it.

MARY MCCARTHY

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MUSIC CHRONICLE

Elektra and Strauss at the Metropolitan

For the first time in history the directors of the Metropolitan Opera have made a gesture toward incorporating the works of a serious and world-renowned musician into the repertoire during his life-time. There have been, to be sure, spasmodic and often admirable attempts at presenting works by Strauss, Stravinsky, Ravel, de Falla, Pizetti, and others as "novelties." Several winters ago, for instance, *Elektra* scored a sensation in this guise, only to be unaccountably withdrawn at the year's end. The past season, however, has seen a surprising change of policy. Works by Richard Strauss were given more performances than those of any composer except Wagner and Verdi. A sort of Strauss cycle was presented, which the public received with that hushed reverence customarily bestowed in America only upon the safely-buried masters.

A key to the understanding of Strauss, and the reason for this sudden acceptance of music which had so long baffled the bourgeoisie, may be detected in the order and dates of his compositions. The tone-poems, upon which his broadest fame has always rested, were written for the most part during the last decade of the 19th Century. The three operas which New York has heard this winter were their successors,—*Salome* (1905), *Elektra* (1909), and the *Rosenkavalier* (1911). With these dates in mind, it can hardly be averred that the Metropolitan is treating its audiences to the last word in contemporary musical expression, even though Strauss may be still alive and still composing. News of the current effort can be greeted only with the subdued applause that we might bestow on the Metropolitan Museum if it were to purchase an important Picasso of the Negro Period (1909)—which it will not do for some time.

Any one can gather from the order in which his best works were produced, and the steady tapering-off in quality after 1911, that Strauss was rooted fast in the traditions of the last century. His stylistic development is curious, however; for there are two forces at work in all his early writing that would seem to be pulling in opposite directions. He has always inordinately loved the simplicity and refinement of Mozart; while his natural gift and inclination lay with the colorful and tempestuous dissonances of the Wagnerian orchestra. Many of his best-established works betray a struggle between the two; until in 1909 the second tradition was killed by *Elektra*. The colossal fabric was finished at last to which every composer had added his cubit since the days of Papa Haydn. *Elektra* marks the end of the way; no one could continue in the direction of *Sturm und Drang* thereafter without provoking mirth. Strauss had killed it as completely as Cervantes had finished off the medieval romance; and through somewhat the same methods, although the two

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were different in kind. *Elektra* goes the whole limit in orchestral sonority, vocal turbulence, and dramatic ferocity, yet the composer has been able to remain completely conscious through it all. There are passages that surge upward into unashamedly lyrical paeans, only to be burlesqued by a squeak from the piccolo, a crack of a whip, or a syncopated blast from the trombones. For this reason a sophisticated audience does not giggle at Strauss's excessiveness as it sometimes can at Wagner's. Strauss had previously made the attempt himself in *Salome,* but here the fusion of emotion and irony is incompletely digested. The earlier work seems to be projecting orchestral sugar-plums that alternate rather than integrate with satire. It may be that the tradition could support only one complete realization, and it is significant that Strauss was immediately forced back on his other self. The *Rosenkavalier* becomes the inevitable, if unexpected, successor to *Elektra.* And, with few exceptions, his later works have followed that direction down to the present day. It is interesting to recall that in the same year, the Cubist painters in Paris also returned to a new analysis of linear and spatial simplicity after their Fauve excesses. And the latter attempts of Strauss to revitalize the tradition that he himself had exterminated (the *Egyptian Helen,* 1927) are as internally moribund as the more recent efforts of Picasso to deliver a knock-out in *Guernica.*

A major reason for the culminating success of *Elektra* lies with the libretto which Von Hofmannsthal has provided. Its swiftness and concentration (there is only one act) are in its favor, for the audience does not become cowed as by the mammoth works of all previous exponents of the tradition, from Berlioz to Mahler. And further, the characters themselves, their triumphs and ultimate dstruction, and the atmosphere of the terrible courtyard, offer an ideal build-up for all that the early 20th century Fauve-period had been attempting to express. The narrative follows Sophocles, with Freudian overtones. Every one of the standard perversions is implied. Elektra herself, although made entirely credible as a character of dignity and nobility, betrays signs of sadism, masochism, narcissism, not to mention her Elektra-complex, and, (in a final effort to win over Chrysothemis) hints at Lesbian advances.

The music of *Elektra* fits the Wagnerian conception of the music-drama in that it is structurally built upon *Leitmotifs* directly connected with the characters, although they have become less obviously descriptive and physical. In the *Ring* cycle, as an example, the themes are customarily attached to the objects and personalities of the narrative; only a few are connected further with emotional states (motive of "Brünnhilde's pleading," motive of "Wotan's wrath"). The themes of *Elektra* tend toward the psychological rather than the physical; there are many besides the one identifying each character directly. There is a motive for Chrysothemis "yearning for motherhood," the "indecision of Chrysothemis" and many others for Chrysothemis' various states of mind. And, when a character is torn with conflicting emotions, the Straussian orchestra is capable of ejecting several themes at once in different keys amid ear-splitting dissonances.

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The orchestration of *Elektra* is of an unparalleled thickness. *Götterdämmerung* requires 108 instruments to complement the singers; *Elektra* is scored for 133 (including a heckelphone, a glockenspiel, a tamtam, and a whip.) As might be imagined, the most original as well as sensational passages are those for which the libretto naturally suggests outlandish effects. The entrance of Klytaemnestra offers an obvious example. She is preceded by a sacrificial procession, and even before the motives of the previous scene have disintegrated is heard the crack of the whip in the orchestra. The text then calls for "a pulling, a dragging of cattle, a muffled scolding, a choked shouting, a struggle of falling men and beasts." When Klytaemnestra appears in the window, tottering from drink and disease, the setting is complete for the cacophonous motive of "Klytaemnestra's terror"; then, as she descends the stairway, the glittering, realistic theme of her jewels is woven into the two motives of Murder and "Klytaemnestra's nightmares."

Yet Strauss's extraordinary musical virtuosity is shown in many passages where the text offers no direct atmospheric stimulus. The structural climax after Elektra's entrance comes at the second call to her father's spirit. The section is introduced by a C-minor chord repeated fortissimo in ascending octaves (known as the theme of "Agamemnon as a shade"). This leads into Elektra's invocation, the voice composed on the Agamemnon motive against the motive of Remembrance in the horns; the Elektra theme, transposed to the minor, with a multitude of accidentals, resolves at the words "zeig dich deinem kind," into the long undulating motive of "the children of Agamemnon" moving to the key of A-flat, pianissimo, over the full choir of strings.

The technical dexterity requisite for the organization of these innumerable orchestral threads could only result from generations of harmonic development. And only a master-virtuoso could have realized so complicated a fabric. Strauss was at once the conqueror and victim of an age that made a fetish of the marvelous. The last Century saw the bourgeoisie capitulate before the virtuoso on every hand, regardless of whether they could understand or not. This characteristic was infectious. So it was that behind the extraordinary textures of Strauss's gigantic orchestra, weaknesses and banality in the aesthetic foundations could lie undetected. Then, when the expression had begun to wear palpably thin, the composer had gone so far that there was no longer a possibility for the turn-about to become completely grounded. Like the great painters of his epoch, the whole concentration of his early efforts had been thrown so strongly in a given direction that the new readjustment could never really hold. Braque, Léger, Picasso, Strauss, Stravinsky,—the conscious and authentic artists of our time,—have all been compelled to reverse their early directions, and in so doing left works of enduring distinction along the way. But no one of them could shake off the essential character of the world into which they had been born. And it is significant that none have been capable of carrying their aesthetic problems with undiminished vitality into the present decade.

GEORGE L. K. MORRIS

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RIPOSTES

TIME'S FIFTEENTH

To tens of thousands of potent, shrewd, able, up-&-coming U. S. citizens last month the postman brought a formal invitation to become a member of "The *Time* Community." Less familiar to sociologists than it should be, The *Time* Community is a microcosm which has come to have a definite, independent existence. The invitation came straight from the able, shrewd, potent publisher of *Time*: baldish, bumbling Ralph McAllister Ingersoll, close relative of the late great Ward McAllister, of "Four Hundred" fame. The letter began, "I hope you won't mind if I make this almost a personal letter about yourself," continued in a chatty, intimate vein, concluding with an excellent facsimile of Publisher Ingersoll's signature. Many a paterfamilias, in high feather, assembled his kith & kin to read aloud: "You have been singled out as one of the comparatively small group for whom we plan and edit *Time*. . . . But before I invite you to join . . . you may wish to know more about The *Time* Community and the other subscribers you will be joining there."

As every one knows, The *Time* Community (i.e., the 700,000-odd weekly buyers of *Time*) is an upstanding, right-thinking group, as shrewd as they are able. But few were prepared for the splendor of Publisher Ingersoll's revelations. Excerpts: "So far only one of you has insured himself for $7,000,000 and only one of you has become King of England. Most of you are just alert, intelligent Americans, quietly successful in your own fields or headed for success. Among you, for example, are 30% of the officers and directors of practically every well known U.S. corporation. . . . Some 74% of you went to college . . . 43% have been to Europe. At home you still find plenty to do. Swimming, of course, and golf and tennis and cards—

45% of you make a hobby of photography
44% of you work in gardens
19% own boats
10% collect books

All told, you entertain 1,640,000 dinner guests each week."

Small wonder, after such statistics, if Publisher Ingersoll ended his letter: "*Time* is more proud of its subscribers than of anything else. . . . And that is why we like to think of our subscribers as a unique *community*—the most alert group of men and women in America. . . . And now speaking for the community, we invite you to join us. The enclosed card entitles you to enroll in The *Time* Community for the next eight months at a special guest rate of only $2.67." Small wonder, too, if many a U. S. citizen felt that $2.67 was small enough to pay for admittance into such a fellowship.

Last month The *Time* Community celebrated its fifteenth anniversary. To each & every one of its members went a birthday present: a facsimile reprint of Vol. 1, No. 1 (date: March 3, 1923) of *Time*. As Timenthusiasts dutifully read it through from cover-to-cover, they found that in its fifteen years of existence their favorite magazine had changed little. The years have brought a smoother, slicker technique, but seasoned Timaddicts (many of them Original Subscribers) were relieved to find the old, familiar point of view flourishing in 1923 as in 1938. As the major house organ for the American business class, *Time* has a ticklish editorial task: to give the news an upper-class angle without appearing to violate the creed of "objectivity" which that class holds so dear. The well-fed, well-heeled members of The *Time* Community insist that their spokesmen fight for their class interests by denying the existence of the class struggle. No one is more adept at this delicate manoeuver than kinetic, bush-browed, twice-wed Henry Robinson Luce, founder and boss of *Time*, *Life*, *Fortune*, and *The March of Time*. And no more striking evidence of his talent exists than Vol. 1,

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No. 1 of *Time, The Weekly Newsmagazine.*

Schooled for his high task at Hotchkiss and Yale, armed with fat checks from people with names like Harkness and Lamont and Iselin, young Harry Luce made his journalistic debut at a dramatically inappropriate time. Just as *Fortune,* founded to ballyhoo Success and the Romance of Business, appeared a few weeks after the 1929 market crash, so *Time,* born with a strong belief in the Divine Rightness of government by Business, materialized just as the scandals of the Harding Administration were beginning to ooze into the public press. This first issue of *Time* contains no hint of the widespreading corruption which five months later was to bring President Harding to his grave. Keynote of the "National Affairs" section is: Congress is about to adjourn—Thank God! The first article on page 1 of this Vol. 1, No. 1 begins: "Seeking only the nation's welfare, Mr. Harding has suffered defeat at the hands of Congress." It concludes: "Today Mr. Harding is prepared to draw a deep breath, for Congressional politics will soon drop over the horizon. After a short holiday in Florida he will gather about him the business men of his cabinet and continue to manage the affairs of the nation, untrammelled until a new Congress rises—from the West."

Thus smart young Harry Luce and his smart young editors got off to a good start. In the rest of their first issue, they give further evidence of their capacity to speak for The *Time* Community. Specifically, they—

—give "three good reasons" why President Harding will not call a special session of Congress during the nine-month recess: "1. The President and Mr. Hughes can develop a foreign policy more easily without Congress than with. 2. The new Congress will generate new opposition to the President in both home and foreign affairs. 3. Business is happier when the Capitol is deserted. Legislation and rumors of legislation cause prices to fluctuate." (Best reason of all, No. 4, not mentioned: lest Congress find out what was going on among the "business men" of the Cabinet.)

—pay a sentimental tribute to "Uncle Joe" Cannon (whose portrait adorns the cover), onetime dictator of the House of Representatives: "He represents the Old Guard in the very flower of its maturity, in the palmy days of McKinley and Mark Hanna, when 'a little group of wilful men' did more than make the gestures of government; they actually ruled Congress, shrewdly, impregnably, and without too much rhetoric. . . . The American people . . . will long for the homely democracy of Mr. Cannon, so often expressed by those homely democratic symbols—Uncle Joe's black cigar and thumping quid."

—pronounce a lengthy elegy over the notorious Theophile Delcassé, most chauvinist and imperialistic of pre-War French politicians: "A statesman whose diplomacy saved his country from ultimate destruction. . . . Without Delcassé France might now be a German province and Foch a refugee."

—settle the hash of two literary pranksters (James Joyce and T. S. Eliot) in an article headlined: "Has the Reader Any Rights Before the Bar of Literature?" Excerpts: "There is a new kind of literature abroad in the land, whose only obvious fault is that no one can understand it. Last year there appeared a gigantic volume entitled *Ulysses* by James Joyce. To the uninitiated, it appeared that Mr. Joyce had taken some half million assorted words—many such as are not ordinarily heard in reputable circles—shaken them up in a colossal hat, laid them end to end. . . . *The Dial* has awarded its $2,000 prize for the best poem of 1922 to an opus entitled *The Waste Land,* by T. S. Eliot. . . . It is rumored that *The Waste Land* was written as a hoax." (Serious authors, on the other hand, find *Time's* editors quite sympathetic.) A novel by Gertrude Atherton called *Black Oxen* receives twice as much space as Messers. Joyce and Eliot combined. "Valuable as an examination of social strata and their relationship," pronounce the editors, vaguely but respectfully. And a work by Arthur Train (of "Mr. Tutt" fame) called *His Children's Children,* despite its radical implications, extorts their admiration: "Whatever the accuracy of its depressing picture of modern so-

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ciety, the novel is interesting and often extremely penetrating.")

—devote a full page to the implications for The *Time* Community of an advance of ½% in the Federal Reserve rediscount rate.

—set down as an item in a column headed "View with Alarm": "A four to one vote to abolish the Wisconsin National Guard. . . . "

—set down as an item in a parallel column headed "Point with Pride": "Castor oil, a cure for popular indifference to the polls." (A reference to the Mussolini technique, described in detail earlier in the issue.)

Thus in their very first issue the editors of *Time* struck and held the classic editorial note. Thus have they held it in the thousands of inter-office memoranda (disguised as magazines called *Time, Life, Fortune*) which for fifteen years they have been distributing among the high-priced, high-powered* executives who make up The *Time* Community. And thus will they continue to hold it, full and true, as long as The Community itself holds together.

DWIGHT MACDONALD

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* Also: shrewd, able, potent.

SUBSTITUTION, AT LEFT TACKLE: HEMINGWAY FOR DOS PASSOS

Between 1926 and 1936

John Dos Passos: Served several years as treasurer of the Communist-controlled National Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners. At the request of the Communist Party served on many other committees, signed many appeals and protests, journeyed to Harlan and other conflict centers, voted for Foster and Ford. Visited and wrote favorably about the U.S.S.R.

Ernest Hemingway: Fished tarpon off Key West, hunted lions in Africa, cheered bull-fights in Spain, made whoopee in Paris, New York, *un peu partout,* socked a drinking companion.

and consequently

June 1932: *New Masses,* reviewing *1919,* a section of what is now the trilogy, *USA,* found Dos Passos sounding "the note of proletarian activism," with "a quality one might call dialectical," and, esteeming him "a good enough Marxist to do justice to both 'destiny' and 'will'," favorably compared him to Zola, Tolstoy—and *Hemingway.*

1935: Granville Hicks, Stalinist super-mandarin, "capped his book on American literature with the figure of Dos Passos" (Mike Gold). Again, Hicks in an official Communist symposium: "Equipped with a many-sided knowledge of American life, and unhampered either by reticence or superficial optimism. . . . Dos Passos' fundamental discovery is that American life is a battleground, and that arrayed on one side are the exploiters and on the other the exploited."

August 1936: The *New Masses* headed a review of Dos Passos' *The Big Money,* also part of *USA,* with the simple title: GREATNESS.

1928: Mike Gold reviewed Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* in the *New Masses*: "There is no humanity in Hemingway." He is "heartless as a tabloid," "too bourgeois to accept the labor world," and affects aloofness as the "last refuge of a scoundrel."

June 1932: A *New Masses* review compared Hemingway unfavorably to—*Dos Passos.*

1935: Hicks, commenting in an essay on "well-known" contemporaries, failed to mention Hemingway.

and then

John Dos Passos and Ernest Hemingway, whose long-standing acquaintance had survived a head-on clash between the former's sense of social responsibility and the latter's "pure aesthetics," journeyed together to Loyalist Spain,

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where

Dos Passos found bombs horrifying, bloodshed gruesome, anarchists hounded by a Stalinist camarilla, the People's Front conceding to Anglo-French imperialism and suppressing socialism. He consequently criticized the Stalinists to his companion.	Hemingway found bombs intriguing, bloodshed exciting, anarchists "treasonable," the People's Front noble, socialism nonsense. He consequently denounced his companion.

Returning to the United States

Dos Passos published articles criticizing the Communist International, defended the honor of the Spanish anarchists, supported the Trotsky Defense Committee, opposed collective security.	Hemingway performed at the Communist Party's Writers Congress, joined skinteen C.P.-controlled committees, wrote a play "exposing" the "Fifth Column," fished tarpon at Key West, and socked Max Eastman.

And then in 1938

Mike Gold, reviewing *USA* (the publication of whose separate parts he greeted warmly) in the *Daily Worker* of Feb. 28, discovers in that book "the clue" to a new esthetic "judgment" of Dos Passos:

"The most frequent word in it is 'merde,' a French euphimism I shall use for the four-letter word, s——t, that Dos Passos so boldly scatters through his pages. (Oh, the courage of it!).

"The merde was there formerly when we praised Dos Passos. But we praised him as a fellow-traveller, not as a Communist. We were anxious to win the fellow-travellers and ignored the merde and looked for every gleam of the proletarian hope.

"There was such hope Dos Passos was moving up from the bourgeois merde. It was right that we recognized in him a powerful if bewildered talent, tried to help free that talent from the muck of bourgeois nihilism.

"He was going somewhere; it was right to hope to the limit and to ignore the merde. Now Dos Passos is going nowhere. On rereading his trilogy, one cannot help seeing how important the merde is in his psychology, and how, after a brief, futile effort, he has sunk back into it, as into a native element.

"Like the Frenchman Celine, Dos Passos hates Communists because organically he seems to hate the human race. It is strange to see how little real humaneness there is in his book. He takes a dull, sadistic joy in showing human beings at their filthiest, meanest, most degraded moments. They have no will power; they are amoeba, moved by chemistry. Everything about them is blah!

"You cannot be a Communist on hate and disgust alone. Lenin 'deeply loved the people,' was his wife's final word upon him. There's not a spark of such dynamic love in the merde-writers like Dos Passos, Farrell, Dahlberg, et al. They reflect only the bourgeois decadence.

"The transition to Trotskyism is easy for such folks. It is only a new form of hatred of the people and of life, and of whatever human hope there is.

"Celine, the French merde-writer, came for a brief spell close to Communism, then departed. Now Celine is an avowed fascist. From merde he came, to merde he has returned.

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"What is the future of Dos Passos? You tell me, Mr. Gingrich!"*

At the same time, Gold, Hicks, Malcolm Cowley and other Stalinist pundits discover in Hemingway a writer of uncommon merit. If he has not yet been canonized to replace the fallen Dos Passos, once the chief boast of the Stalinist "critics," he seems to have been beatified. At any rate, one thing is clear to all concerned: his product is not *merde,* for it comes from the People's Front.

* * *

At this point it is customary for some charitable soul to say that Mike Gold was cockeyed drunk when he did it, and that what he says does not represent the Communist Party. Far be it from me to suspect Mike of having been sober, but let me record that on March 16 the *Daily Worker* printed a letter from Mike's comrade, Stavros Savides (of Boston!), which letter reads as follows:

"Mike Gold's penetrating, powerful proletarian criticism of John Dos Passos in the *Daily Worker,* was the finest literary criticism I have read in many, many moons. Only a sincere Marxist-Leninist critic could accomplish this tremendous feat of explaining an author of John Dos Passos's literary dimensions in so few words.

"Thank God, we have genuine proletarian criticism. Cheer up, Mike, soon we shall have just as powerful creative literature too. We have the seeds and the soil for such a literature, and for every seed that is planted on rocks as is the case with Dos Passos, there will be a hundred seeds planted on fertile soil that will produce the finest socialist literature we can ever dream of.

"As for the future of Dos Passos, it all depends on his ability to get away from that 'merde.' He ought to consult a competent psychiatrist."

Psychiatrist? They do these things better in Moscow.

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* Gold mentions the publisher of *Esquire* (whom, always prefering French for indecent words, he calls an *entrepreneur*) as an added proof of Dos Passos' lowness, because Gingrich says he thinks Dos Passos has written a great book. Gingrich is chiefly famous as the chief magazine publisher of Hemingway's writings.

HERBERT SOLOW

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